

11/10/2
REMARKS

ON

DR. PRIESTLEY'S SYSTEM

OF

Materialism, Mechanism, and Necessity,

IN A

SERIES OF LETTERS

TO

THE REVEREND MR. WESLEY,

INTRODUCTORY TO

AN ESSAY

TOWARDS THE PROOF

OF AN

IMMORTAL SPIRIT IN MAN.

Quid jucundius quam scire quid simus, quid fuerimus, quid
erimus, et cum his etiam divina et suprema illa post obitum mun-
dique vicissitudines. *Cardan*

H U L L:

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P R E F A C E.

WHEN the Author began these *Remarks*, he only intended to write *one single Letter*, by way of Preface to the *Essay* on the *separate existence of the soul*, which he had previously drawn up, but as he proceeded, he was so struck with the inconsistency of the Doctrine here refuted, and such a number of observations occurred respecting it, that he could not prevail with himself to dismiss the subject till he had written all that follows. But, after this, he would not have dared so far to trust his own judgment as to conclude these *Letters* were worthy of the public notice, had he not first submitted them to the inspection of the person to whom they are inscribed and taken *his* opinion. Through his advice, though with much diffidence, *they* are now sent abroad: and as an apology to the *Christian reader*, for putting into his hands, what may seem, at first sight, to have little tendency to administer to his spiritual improvement; the Author wishes here to intimate, that though these *Remarks* are not *directly* calculated to afford him much edification in *faith* or *holiness*, yet *indirectly* they may promote both the one and the other. They are intended and it is hoped, in some measure adapted to expose and disprove that vain Philosophy,

which would turn *man*, the *image* of that God who is a *spirit*, into a *mere machine*, a *body* without a *soul*, a piece of organized matter, all whose motions are purely mechanical, necessary and unavoidable. If therefore, they do not tend to *build the reader up in his most holy faith*, yet if they demolish the engines, devised by some Philosophers of the age, to *undermine and destroy* that faith, they may still have their use and be read with profit.

Surely if there is a doctrine under heaven which overthrows all *religion and morality*, it is the doctrine here opposed, the doctrine which teaches *man has no soul*; that while he lives, he is a mere piece of *clock-work*, necessarily and unavoidably swayed in all his *volitions and actions* by surrounding objects; and that when he dies, the *whole of him* returns to the dust out of which he was taken. This is the doctrine, the *unreasonableness* of which, it has been the author's endeavour, to set in a clear point of view in the following pages. And if the reader see it in the same light of inconsistency in which it has appeared to the writer of these sheets; he will not only have convincing proof that the *great Philosopher* who opposes so strenuously, and declaims so constantly against the *Divinity and Atonement* of Christ, and the *influence of divine Grace* upon the soul, is not *infallible*; but will be furnished also with, at least, a *presumptive* argument that he who is given up to so *strong a delusion* as to believe himself and all mankind to be *mere machines*, is very probably mistaken respecting those other important particulars also; and that after all his *peremptory and repeated* assertions to the contrary, the *Lord Jesus* may

may happen to be something more than a *mere man*, may be a proper object of *worship*, and may have made a *real atonement* for the sins of mankind and *be able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, as ever living to make intercession for them*: The Evangelists and Apostles may perhaps have *written*, as well as *spoken*, by *inspiration*, and may be worthy of entire credit in all they have delivered, and even St. Paul that "inconclusive reasoner," may be as sure a guide in the search of truth as Dr. Priestley.

One important lesson, at least, the reader may learn from this publication; he may learn how *dangerous* it is to leave the Bible, or to depart from that *simplicity of faith* in its sacred *Truths*, which credits all that the Lord hath spoken, and receives *his testimony* as *certain* and *infallible*. He will reflect that the person who teaches *we have no souls*, and who, it seems, is not far from teaching, *there is no God*, or none that can profit us, began his inglorious course of delusive error by calling in question the testimony of Scripture concerning the Lord that bought him. Hence he soon disbelieved his *Divinity*, then his Pre-existence, and then his *miraculous conception*, and proceeded from less to more till he denied him in all his *characters* and *offices*, even in that of an *infallible teacher*, not allowing his very *doctrine* to be in all points a sure ground of confidence. Thus by undermining the authority of Scripture, even of that delivered by our Lord himself, he has paved the way for discarding any revealed truth that does not comport with his pre-conceived scheme. And is this the person that sets up for

an *Oracle* and assumes to himself the office of *Reformer General* of all *Creeds*, *Confessions of Faith* and *Articles of religion*?

Some *errors* are of so ridiculous a nature that it is not easy to bring one's self to oppose them *seriously*: nor indeed does that seem the best way of doing it. They are, perhaps, better attacked in the way of *Irony*. Such, it has appeared to the author of this *Tract*, are the errors here touched upon; *errors* of so extravagant a nature and supported by such strange inconsistent reasoning, that one is tempted to think Dr. *Priestley* could not believe his own doctrine, but was only making the experiment, (like the *Conjurer* that was to leap into the bottle) whether there, be any absurdity *too great* for a part, at least of the poor bewildered offspring of Adam to be induced to believe.

Only let me add, if any *Christian* reader find neither *pleasure* nor *profit* in perusing the *Letters*, he is referred to the *Essay* in which it is hoped he will meet with both. As the Author has no doubt but it fully proves, and that on the surest ground viz. the ground of *divine revelation*, that man has a *soul* which will out-live his *body*; so he trusts it will be a means of confirming the reader's faith in that most needful and important truth and of arming him against all the sophistry whereby *men of corrupt minds* and *reprobate concerning the faith*, endeavour to overthrow it.

REMARKS,

REMARKS, &c.

LETTER I.

Reverend and dear Sir,

AS Dr. Priestley's System of *Mate. i. lism* is closely connected with, (if it be not the foundation on which he builds) his capital arguments, designed for the overthrow of the Pre-existence and Godhead of Christ, the virtue of his Atonement, the influence of divine Grace upon the soul and other fundamental truths of Christianity; it seems proper, before I comply with your and Mrs. Fletcher's request, with regard to revising and finishing the Letters which Mr. Fletcher had begun to the Doctor, in defence of one of these important doctrines, that I should prepare the way by making some remarks on that system, and reminding the Christian reader of a few passages in the Holy Scriptures, which, it appears to me, entirely sap that foundation and leave his principle arguments no ground to stand on.

2. I do not, indeed, suppose that these passages will have any weight with the Doctor. For though he has not yet entirely rejected the authority of the inspired volume, yet, with a felicity peculiar to himself and other Socinian writers, he can easily construe into some other sense, such texts as militate against his Scheme. Or, if at any time, this

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be not so easy, he can suppose that the passage is an interpolation, or has been corrupted by the Orthodox, or is a strong Eastern figure of speech and not to be taken literally, or that our Lord and his Apostles spoke, in this instance, according to the prevailing sentiments of the times, which they did not think it proper to contradict, or that in this point, even *they themselves* were mistaken. It would astonish a person, who has been accustomed to take the Scriptures in their plain and obvious sense, and who has not read Dr. Priestley and such like authors, that any one under a profession of Christianity should hold and propagate opinions so manifestly unchristian, and attempt to reconcile them with the word of God.

3. As to that part of his extraordinary system which I now refer to, and which is indeed the foundation of the whole, those who have saved themselves the pain of mind, which the perusal of his works cannot fail to give a serious Christian, must be informed, he teaches that man is a *mere body* without a *soul*, that what we call the *soul*, viz. the principle of *thought* and *intelligence*, is the necessary result of that particular arrangement of matter which composes the human brain; that it neither is nor can be distinct from it: and of course that when that particular arrangement of matter is dissolved and ceases, the soul is dissolved and ceases also. He is aware that this doctrine implies that man is a mere Machine, unavoidably moved and impelled by surrounding objects and such perceptions and ideas as they occasion and suggest; and that it draws after it the *absolute necessity* of all human *actions* and *volitions*. But not at all alarmed at this, or in the least suspicious of the truth of a doctrine, which, in its certain consequences, makes God the sole author of all the sin committed in the world, or rather totally annihilates the distinction between *sin* and

and holiness, between vice and virtue; and leaves mankind no more accountable for their actions than the cattle that graze in their meadows or the grass these cattle feed on; he openly avows and defends one of these consequences, viz. that God is indeed the *Author of sin*, and spends many pages in shewing what happy effects would follow, should his doctrine on this head be so fully embraced as to become the ruling principle of our whole conduct.

4. But, that it may fully appear I do not misrepresent his system, I shall select from different parts of his writings sundry passages, in which, with sufficient clearness, he repeatedly tells us what it is. Thus, *Disq.* P. 160, "Man consists wholly of matter as much as the river does of water or the Forrest of trees." *Hist. of Cor.* P. 425, "Agreeably to the dictates of reason and the testimony of Scripture rightly understood" we should "acquiesce in the opinion that man is himself an *homogeneous Being* and that the power of sensation and thought belong to the brain, as much as gravity and magnetism belong to other arrangements of matter." *Disq.* P. 124. "According to the Christian System, the body is necessary to all the perceptions and exertions of the mind; and if this be the case, what evidence can there be, that it is not dependant upon the body for its existence also; that is, what evidence can there be, that the faculty of thinking does not inhere in the body itself, and that there is no such thing as a *soul* separate from it?"—P. 355. "The principle object (of this treatise) is to prove the uniform composition of man, or that what we call *mind*, or the principle of perception and thought, is not a substance distinct from the body, but the result of corporeal organization."—

"Whatever matter be, I think, I have sufficiently

“ficiently proved, that mind is nothing more than
 “a modification of it.” P. 356. The doctrine
 “of necessity, maintained in the Appendix, is the
 “immediate result of the doctrine of the materiality
 “of man, for *mechanism* is the undoubted conse-
 “quence of *materialism*. *Preface to Phil. Necess.* P.
 19. “If man be wholly a *material*, it will not be
 “denied but that he must be a *mechanical* being.”
 “Every thing therefore belonging to the doctrine
 “of *materialism*, is in fact an argument for the
 “doctrine of *necessity*, and consequently the doctrine
 “of *Necessity* is a direct inference from *Materialism*.”

5. That the *Doctor* considers this necessity as
 extending to all the thoughts, words and works,
 good and bad, of all mankind, so as to make God
 the sole author of them all, is plain from the fol-
 lowing passages, *Pref.* P. 25. “The Ancients had
 “no just idea of the proper *mechanism* of the *mind*,
 “depending upon the certain influence of motives
 “to determine the will, by means of which the
 “whole series of events, from the beginning of the
 “world to the consummation of all things, makes
 “one connected *chain of causes and effects* originally
 “established by the Deity.” And P. 8. *Phil. Nec.*
 speaking of the “fixed laws of nature respecting the
 “will,” and that “it is never determined without
 “some real or apparent cause, foreign to itself,”
 and that “motives influence us in some definite and
 “invariable manner, so that every volition or
 “choice is constantly regulated and determined by
 “what precedes it;” he adds “This being admitted
 “to be fact, there will be a necessary connexion
 “between all things past, present and to come, in the
 “way of proper cause and effect, as much in the in-
 “tellectual as in the natural world; so that how little
 “soever the bulk of mankind may be apprehensive
 “of it, or staggered by it, according to the established
 “laws of nature, no event could have been other-
 “wise

"wise than it *has been*, *is* or *is to be*, and therefore
 "all things past present and to come, are precisely
 "what the author of nature really intended them to
 "be and has made provision for."

6. He illustrates his meaning, which however is clear enough, by a comparison, P. 9, 10. "Unless the fundamental laws of the system were changed, it would be impossible that any event should have been otherwise than it was;—just as the precise place where a billiard ball rests is necessarily determined, by the impulse given to it at first, notwithstanding its impinging against ever so many other balls or the sides of the table." So that according to the Doctor, the mind of man, is as perfectly passive as a billiard ball, and is as much at the mercy of surrounding objects and motives, as a billiard ball is at the mercy of the impulses given to it by any person or thing. For says he (*Disq.* P. 96.) "Sensations and ideas comprehend all the objects of thought, and all the exertions or emotions of the soul, as far as we can observe, always succeed sensations or ideas; and to all appearance are as much occasioned and produced by them as any effect in nature can be said to be produced by its proper cause; the one invariably following the other, according to a certain established law."

"In fact (proceeds he) a *ball*, acted upon by a foreign mechanical impulse, may just as well be said to have a self moving power as the soul of man; sensations and ideas being as properly an impelling force respecting the mind, as the stroke of a *rod* &c. is an impelling force with respect to the *ball*."

7. Hence he affirms (*Phil. Nec.* P. 43.) that "all motions are equally mechanical," and "in every view of the subject, whether the will be considered in a popular or philosophical sense, it appears, that

" its determinations must be directed by certain in-
 " variable laws, depending upon the previous state
 " of the mind and the ideas present to it at the
 " moment of forming any resolution ; so that in no
 " case whatever could they have been otherwise
 " than they actually were." A soothing doctrine
 this to the man, whose conscience accuses him of
 enormities and crimes, which, he torments himself
 with thinking he might have avoided. Let him
 hearken to *Dr. Priestley*, and give his fears to the
 wind. In committing adultery, incest, robbery and
 murder he has only been obeying the fundamental
 laws of the system and fulfilling the will of his
 Almighty Creator. For says he (*Dedication P. 9.*)
 " whatever men may intend or execute, all their
 " designs and all their actions are subject to the
 " secret influence and guidance of one who is neces-
 " sarily the best judge of what will most promote his
 " own excellent purposes." And if adultery and mur-
 der will most promote *these*, why should any one con-
 demn the adulterer and murderer ? Or why should he
 condemn *himself* ? Let him know (*P. 12.*) " There
 " is but one will in the whole universe, and this
 " one will, exclusive of all chance, or the inter-
 " ference of any other will, disposes of all things,
 " even to their minutest circumstances," and (*P. 13*)
 " is always done on earth as well as in heaven."
 It is done therefore when adultery and incest, rob-
 bery and murder are committed, as truly and as
 fully as when men are temperate and chaste, just
 and merciful. Nor is it needful to pray that it *may*
be done because it always is and must be done, and
 that *necessarily* and *unavoidably*, otherwise the funda-
 mental laws of the system would be altered, which
 is impossible.

8. Nor is it on the authority of *Dr. Priestley* only
 that we are to believe this doctrine ; but on that of
 several other learned and great Philosophers also,
 and

and in particular of Mr. *Hobbes*. This gentleman, Dr. *Priestley* tells us (*Pref. P. 27.*) "was the first who understood and maintained the proper doctrine of Philosophical necessity," (which we have just seen stated and explained in the Doctor's own words) and, in the judgement of the *Doct.r*, did no small honour to this country in making such a capital and glorious discovery, that man is a mere machine, and that all his volitions and actions are *necessary* and *unavoidable*. Mr. *Hobbes*, it seems, assures us that "the liberty of man in doing what he will, is accompanied with the necessity of doing what God will and no more nor less," and that "we cannot have any passion, will or appetite of which God's will is not the cause." In the mouth, therefore, of *these two great witnesses, of unquestionable credit and authority*, this important matter is fully established, and all sin of what kind soever, committed as has been supposed, against God, our neighbour and our-selves, in thought and desire, temper, word and work, and vulgarly called *disobedience* and the *transgression of the law*, is in reality *obedience* and the *keeping of the law*, even *obedience* to the supreme and irresistible will of God, which always is and must be done, and *keeping the fundamental law*, or laws, of the system which it is as impossible for any creature to transgress, as it is for the Almighty to be overcome.

9. What a pity it is, considering how well calculated this doctrine is to quiet men's consciences, that it should be confined to Philosophers and their disciples, and should not meet with a more favourable reception among the illiterate and the vulgar. For these, it must be confessed, have *almost* as much need of it as the great and the learned. But as Horace justly observed.

————Sensus communis in ista
Fortuna rarus : —

No

Not but that they will go along with our Doctor a certain length, but as he tells us (*Phil. Nec. P.* 105.) “ When they are told that in consequence of “ these concessions they must admit that nothing “ could have been otherwise than it has been, that “ every thing comes to pass in consequence of an “ established constitution of things, a constitution “ established by the author of nature, and therefore “ that God is to be considered as the proper and “ sole cause of all things, good and evil, natural “ and moral, they are staggered and withhold their “ assent.”

10. “ From this place therefore, (adds he) the “ Philosopher must be content to proceed by him- “ self,” who, however, it seems will be amply re- “ compensated for his courage, in venturing to ascend “ into the regions of speculation, in the philosophical “ Balloon which, with the help of *Lord Kaim*, *Mr. Hob- “ bes*, and *Dr. Hartley*, *Dr. Priestley*, has constructed, “ while the vulgar souls, that are affraid to rise above “ the ground their forefathers stood on, and are content “ to *walk* when they might *fly*, are necessarily deprived “ of the enlarged and comprehensive view this aerial “ tour would give them. For “ we shall see (pro- “ ceeds he) that his more comprehensive views of “ the system of nature” (viz. ‘ that God is the “ proper and sole cause of all things, good and evil, “ natural and moral’) “ are not *less*, but much more “ favourable to his improvement in virtue and hap- “ piness, than the more limited views of the bulk “ of mankind. These” (alas! for their poor, low, “ groveling, unphilosophical ideas!) “ look no fur- “ ther for the causes of men’s” (wicked) “ actions “ than to men” (sometimes indeed they may “ think the Devil hath some hand in them) “ whereas “ the Philosopher considers them as necessary instru- “ ments in the hands of the first cause.” Prepare “ we therefore, Reverend Sir, to attend while the “ Doctor

Doctor "fairly traces the consequences of this more
"enlarged and juster view of things," if peradventure
his discourse may induce us also to become Philosophers!
In the mean time, excuse the liberty I take in
addressing you upon this subject, and believe me to be

Your unnecessitated,

Free and voluntary

Servant in Christ,

JOSEPH BENSON.

LETTER II.

L E T T E R II.

Reverend and dear Sir,

I Fear the concluding part of my former letter would raise your expectations too high, concerning the advantages to be derived from this famous system; and that you will feel a great disappointment when I begin this letter with informing you, in the Doctor's words, (P. 106) "that the practical use of these (his) philosophical views, is confined to a man's cooler moments, when the mind is not under the influence of any violent emotion or passion. For" (adds he) "since the mind of a Philosopher is formed and the associations by which it is influenced are fixed ~~early~~ ^{early} like those of other men," (he being a mere body without a soul, like them and all his motions purely mechanical, necessarily produced and directed, caused and determined by surrounding objects) "he will not be able in the general hurry of life to feel, think or act different from other men: but a provocation will fix his resentment upon the person from whom it immediately proceeds, or a grateful and kind action will in like manner direct his love and gratitude to the person from whom it immediately comes; his own actions also will be considered with the same mechanical feelings of *self applause* or *remorse*, as if he had not been a philosopher." For, (that I may add a word in confirmation of the Doctor's opinion) though a Philosopher, he is still but a machine (a billiard ball, suppose) and must move fast or slow, this way or that, according to the impulse given him by persons or things around. But when this floating creature, this Philosophical Machine, or Mechanical Philosopher, is drawn out
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of this tumult of surrounding waters which toss him to and fro, like a cork;—When, as the Doctor expresses it, “he is retired from the world,”—“in his cooler moments, and under the influence of no violent emotion and therefore contemplating nothing very recent,” the case will be different: The “*Mechanism of his mind*,” receiving fewer impulses from outward objects will be more gentle and uniform in its motions, and he will reap the full effect of his philosophy.

2. “Consider we therefore (P. 106) the feelings of this Philosopher” in these circumstances, when, if he is not quite at rest from external objects and the sensations and ideas they occasion, (in which case, I presume he would stand stock still, like a watch gone down, having no principle of motion within himself) yet is “under the influence of no violent emotion,” (as the Doctor has it) and “therefore is contemplating nothing very recent;” recent events, it seems, having, by some unknown law of the system, the power of necessarily producing violent emotions; And no wonder, for bodies attract each other, not only according to the quantity of matter they contain, but also according to their respective distances; and recent events, being near at hand, affect the more powerfully: “Let us consider (I say with the Doctor P. 107.) “what alteration in a man’s sentiments and conduct,” these views, “will tend to produce, “whether the change will be favourable or unfavourable, whether his Philosophy will make him the better or the worse man, the better or the worse Christian.”

3. And first “In the Doctor’s opinion, his philosophical views,” viz. that man is a mere machine, and that all his motions are equally mechanical and equally necessary and unavoidable, “will give an elevation and force to his piety and to virtue in all

" all its branches that could not have been acquired
 " any other way." " This, the Doctor thinks, may
 " be perceived in those persons whose general
 " views of things have approached the nearest to
 " those that are truly philosophical," by which he
 " means those who from a *principle of religion*, have
 " ascribed more to God and less to man than other
 " persons," and produces " the sacred writers and
 " others who have imbibed their devotional spirit,
 " from an intimate acquaintance with the scriptures "
 as instances of this. The Doctor would have us to infer, that if their views of things, instead of approaching very near to those that are *truly philosophical*, had been *wholly so*, they would have ascribed, not only " more to God and less to man," than other people, but would have ascribed *all* to God, and *nothing* to man, as Dr. Priestley, Dr. Hartley, Lord Kaims, Mr. Hume, and Mr. Hobbes do; and would have been as perfect in the devotional spirit as these gentlemen are known to be or to have been. In other words, if the being *almost* Materialists and Necessarians, produced to *much* of a spirit of true devotion in the Prophets and Apostles, the being *altogether such*, as Dr. Priestley is, and Mr. Hobbes, and Mr. Hume were, would have produced as great perfection in devotion as these, *confessedly* most devout persons, were or are possessed of!

4. But, adds he P. 108. " That the spirit of
 " devotion in general must be greatly promoted by
 " the persuasion that God is the proper and sole
 " cause of all things needs no arguing." For " upon
 " this Scheme, we see God in every thing " (I add
 even in adultery and murder) " and may be said
 " to see every thing " (even adultery and murder)
 " in God; because we continually view every
 " thing," (even adultery and murder) as in connexion with him the author of it. By this means,
 " the idea of God will become associated with
 " every

every other idea," (even those of adultery and murder) "heightening all our pleasures," (arising from the commission of the former) "and diminishing, nay absorbing and annihilating all our pains," of conscience on account of having been guilty of the latter.

5. It is evident therefore to a demonstration, that the *spirit of devotion* must be even *perfected* by its doctrine when truly embraced. But this is little in comparison of the other blessed effects which it will produce.

To be persuaded that we are mere machines and that we speak and think by the unavoidable, necessitating influence of motives, and are as mechanical in all our motions as a clock or watch, must necessarily produce *humility* yea the "deepest humility, (as the Doctor assures us) the most entire *resignation* to the will of God and the most unreserved confidence in his goodness and providential care." And then with these views "it will not be possible to bear ill will to any of our" other machines, whose motions, if they happen to clash with ours, we shall know to be purely mechanical and not at all owing to themselves, but solely to their maker, with whom we shall not care to quarrel. So that (P. 109.) "this one leading principle of devotion cannot fail to regulate the whole temper and conduct. It necessarily implies or begets every thing in a man's temper that is truly amiable and valuable." Nay (he assures us P. 111.) That "with such sublime views of the system and of the author of it," as he gives us, "vice is absolutely incompatible; and more especially *envy*, *hatred* and *malice* are wholly excluded. I cannot (says he) as a necessarian hate any man, because I consider him as being in all respects just what God has made him to be, and also as *doing* with respect to me," (even
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when he picks my pocket, robs my house, debauches my wife or murders my child) "nothing but what he was expressly designed and appointed to do; God being the only cause and men no thing more than the instruments in his hands to execute all his pleasure;" to commit *theft* and *robbery*, *murder* and *adultery*, as often as he pleases which it appears, with regard to some, is not seldom.

6. And if as, a necessarian, he "ceases to blame men for their vices in the ultimate sense of the word," or to love them for their virtues, any further than as mere instruments, "I cannot help (proceeds he) "on my system, viewing them with a *tenderness* and *compassion* that will have an infinitely finer and happier effect; as it must make me more earnest and unwearied in my endeavours to" (alter the fundamental laws of the system, to oppose the almighty will destination and appointment of God and to) "reclaim them" (from those sins and vices which, as we have just seen, they are expressly designed, appointed, and necessitated to commit) "without suffering myself to be offended, and desist from my labour through provocation, disgust or despair." For as the Doctor sets himself to oppose their wickedness, as a man would set himself to hinder the flowing of the tide, which he knows will flow just as far as God appoints and no further; so he is neither provoked nor disgusted that they are wicked, nor does he despair of their being otherwise, when God shall appoint otherwise, or when the proper period comes for the tide of their vices to ebb and the wheel of the great Machine of nature to come round again. In other words as he looks upon them as "mere instruments in the hands of God and as *being* and *doing* nothing but what God expressly designed and appointed them to be

"and

and to do," God himself being "the proper and sole cause of all things, good and evil natural and moral;" so it can only be in *jest* or in *pro-nce*, it cannot be in *earnest* that he endeavours to reclaim or oppose them; as it cannot be that so vile a man and so great a Philosopher as Dr. Priestley, so well acquainted with the nature of *causes* and *effects*, and the weakness of *instruments* when compared with *agents*, it cannot be (I say) that he should attempt *seriously* to change the immutable laws of the system, or resist the order and appointment of the first and only cause of all things. Hence, as he sets about this business, only as it were in jest and not in earnest, so he is neither *provoked* nor *disgusted* when it does not succeed; especially as he is well paid for what he does in this way and is liberally maintained by his congregation for making these playful and amusing efforts to hinder the decrees of fate, and stop the progress of dire necessity.

7. Indeed as to his using (P. 113.) the word "reclaimed" at all in this business, it seems it was an oversight, for who, that wishes to speak properly, would talk of reclaiming men from obeying the *will*, fulfilling the *laws* and answering the *appointment* of the first, sole and constant cause of all things? who would talk of "reclaiming" water from flowing, the tide from ebbing, or the flame of a candle from ascending? Surely tis an abuse of words to talk of reclaiming a piece of mere mechanism from those purely mechanical motions which its author has given it. The Doctor therefore, certainly forgets his principles when he says (P. 113.) "The natures of the most vicious of mankind being the same with my own, they are as improvable as mine, and whatever their disposition be at present, it is capable of being changed for the better, by means naturally

"adapted to that end; and under the discipline of the universal parent, they will, no doubt, be reclaimed, sooner or later." For how can a disposition be improved or changed for the better which is already so perfect as to correspond *exactly* with the will of God, and has no *though* or *design*, *temper* or *passion* of which God's will is not the cause? And how can any man need to be reclaimed who moves as obediently to every impulse given him as a billiard ball?

8. But it may be said, that, since according to the Doctor, "man consists wholly of matter as much as the river does of water, or the forest of trees," he surely may improve as a *tree* or a *river*, and "the Mechanism of his mind," perhaps may be changed for the better and made more perfect by him who made it at first. Then I answer "the means naturally adapted to that end," must be of a similar nature with those whereby a *river*, *tree* or piece of Mechanism is improved and altered for the better. Surely not *sermons* or *prayers*, *advice* or *exhortation*, for whoever thought of preaching to a *tree* or *river*, or of exhorting a *watch* or *clock* to move *faster* or *slower*? But some proper application of *matter* to *matter*, either in the way of *food* or *physic*, *air* or *exercise*, or to take the Machine in pieces by death and build it up again of better materials and in a more masterly manner at the resurrection.

9. It seems therefore that the Doctor "who is so earnest and unwearied in his endeavours to reclaim mankind," is under a little mistake as to *he means*, and instead of publishing books and preaching sermons, had better apply himself to the practice of *Physic*, administer medicines, prescribe a proper regimen, and take care that his patients have *air* and *exercise* adapted to their case. This is certainly the most likely way to alter and improve the

the *body*, in all its parts, and man consists of *nothing else*; he is *wholly* material, and *perception* and *intelligence*, and much more *passion* and *appetite* arise *altogether* from, and depend *entirely* upon the modification of matter in his *head* or *heart* or both, and what effect books and sermons, instructions and exhortations can have in altering the modification of that matter, it is difficult, if not impossible to say. If therefore, as he says "Their sufferings will be in proportion to their depravity, and for this reason, he cannot but feel himself most earnestly concerned to lessen it." I hope he will remember that, according to his own doctrine it can only be a *depravity* of the *body*, either of the matter of which it is composed or of the *modification* of that matter, and that he will hereafter apply his remedies accordingly, endeavouring by some likely means to change the depraved Machine either as to its *matter* or *form*.

10. And yet, as to God, "nothing (not even this same depravity) "is seen as an evil, but as a "necessary and useful part of a perfect whole," his attempting to remove it, will be attempting to remove what, in his own judgement, is "no evil, "but a necessary and useful part of a perfect "whole." It will be like a bungling artist attempting to remove the wheel of a watch, the use and absolute necessity of which he nevertheless sees and confesses. So that upon the whole, it seems most advisable for the Doctor to stand aside and not meddle in the business, but be quiet, lest, while he attempts to mend the work of infinite wisdom, and alter the fundamental laws of the system, he only shew his folly and weakness; more especially as he himself, though a Philosopher, is yet but a Machine, his "mind being formed and the associations whereby it is influenced being fixed exactly like those of other men," and it seems too much;

for one Machine to attempt to alter another, or for *one* to attempt altering *many*. And I doubt not but the Doctor, notwithstanding "his deep concern" on account of "the sufferings of mankind" and his "earnest desire to lessen them," will be able to repress his ardor and check his rashness in this matter, under "the full persuasion he has (P. 109.) "that nothing can come to pass without the knowledge and express appointment of the greatest and best of beings;" and that "notwithstanding all present unfavourable appearances, *whatever is, is right*;" and that even all *evil*, respecting individuals or societies, any part or the whole of the human race, will terminate in *good* and the greatest sum of good could not, in the nature of things, be attained by any other means." So that had the Doctor succeeded in his endeavours to lessen the "*depravity*" and "sufferings," of mankind, he would so far, not only have altered "what is precisely as the author of nature really intended it to be," and have changed the appointment of the greatest and best of beings, (which as it was impossible, so would have been impious) but would also have made that *wrong* which was *right* and have prevented, in some degree, that "greatest sum of good" which "in the nature of things can only be attained" by that depravity and those sufferings.

11. No wonder therefore that the Doctor feels no "disgust or provocation" at finding his endeavours unsuccessful: no wonder that he feels (P. 109) "a joyful serenity in his mind," let men be as wicked and miserable as they will. (For, they are, his own words P. 110.) though "upon any other hypothesis, it may be believed that many things are continually *going wrong*, and that much *actual evil*, unconnected with, and unproductive of "good, does exist:" yet "in the eye of a necessa-

rian

"rian, the idea of *real absolute evil*, wholly dis-
 "appears: since in the contemplation of a mind,
 "possessed of a sufficient degree of comprehension,
 "all partial evils, are infinitely overballanced,
 "and are therefore really and truly *annihilated*, in
 "the idea of the greater good to which they are
 "subserving, and which, when properly disposed,
 "(as by infinite wisdom they undoubtedly are)
 "they really heighten." Hence (P. 111) "he re-
 "gards every person and every thing" (even adul-
 "tery and murder) "in a friendly and pleasing
 "light," as "necessarily connected with and ne-
 "cessary parts of an immense glorious and happy
 "system," of which God is the author, and view-
 "ing all as "one family, training up in the same
 "school of moral discipline," he looks upon all
 "(even adulterers and murderers) "as joint heirs of
 "eternal life revealed to us in the gospel."

12. What a pity, Reverend Sir, you had not
 embraced this system in the early part of your life.
 For as you have spent above half a century in un-
 wearied labours to lessen the sins and miseries of
 mankind, and during that time, have doubtless
 often lamented to find your endeavours less success-
 ful than you could have wished; you might by
 this means have saved yourself much distress of
 mind, many uneasy and painful reflections! Leaving
 you to consider, whether, though in your eighty-
 seventh year, it would not still be worth your
 while for the sake of such mighty advantages, to
 enter into Dr. *Priestley's* views and become a Ma-
 terialist and Necessarian, I subscribe myself

Reverend Sir,

Your servant in Christ, &c.

LETTER III.

L E T T E R III.

Reverend Sir,

I Find, upon looking again into the *Doctor's* Book, that in laying before you the advantages to be derived from embracing the Doctrine of *Necessity*, I have omitted *one* of peculiar importance, which I now beg leave to submit to your consideration; and the rather, because it is of a *singular* nature and such as no one would suppose could belong to this system. It is this: "That the Doctrine of *Necessity* makes every man the maker of his own fortune in a stricter sense than any other system whatever." *Phil. Nec. P. 99.* For, it is well known, that *most* or *all* other systems suppose man to be an *intelligent Being*, possessed of liberty of choice and action, or, in other words, a *free agent*, having within him a *self determining power*, which he may *use* or *abuse*; whereas this system implies that he is wholly a *material being*, a mere *machine*, and that all his *volitions* and *actions* are as mechanical as the motions of a clock, and *entirely* and *constantly* owing to the constitution and appointment of the supreme Artist. It follows therefore, that, as a *watch* is the *maker of its own motions*, and as it depends wholly on *itself* whether it shall go fast or slow, regularly or irregularly; so a man is the maker of his own success, and it depends wholly on himself whether he shall prosper or not.

2. But we will let the Doctor set this matter in a clear point of view so that all may see and believe. "It is imagined by some (says he P. 96.) that the apprehension of all the actions of men depending upon motives which necessarily influence their determinations, so that no action or event could possibly be otherwise than it has

"been, is, or is to be, would make men indifferent
 "with respect to their conduct, or to what befalls
 "them in life. I answer, so it would, if their own
 "actions and determinations were not necessary
 "links in this chain of causes and events:" that is,
 if God had not, by the constitution of their nature
 and the immutable laws of the system, laid them
 under an absolute necessity of *determining* and *act'ng*
 as they do; "and if their good or bad success did
 "not in the strictest sense of the word *depend upon*
themselves;" precisely as a watch's going well or ill
 depends upon itself, notwithstanding that its
 main spring is tempered, and all its parts formed
 and fixed by its maker, so that it is impossi-
 ble it should go faster or slower than he has
 made it to go. Just so, though the will and ap-
 pointment of God and the immutable laws of the
 system, have absolutely fixed all the *determinations*
 and *actions* of men, so that they always are "pre-
 "cisely what the author of nature really intended
 "them to be" (P. 8. *Phil. Nec.*) and men can have
 "no *passion*, *will* or *appetite* of which God's will
 "is not the cause;"—though "God, that seeth
 "and disposeth all things, seeth also that the liberty
 "of man, in doing what he will, is accompanied
 "with the necessity of doing that which God will,
 "and no more nor less;" yet still men's "good or
 "bad success in the strictest sense of the word
 "depends upon themselves," and they only are
 to blame if they have not good success, being the
 sole makers of their own fortune! What a close
 reasoner is Dr. *Priestley*! His arguments are per-
 fect demonstrations! God frames the immutable
 laws of the system, the immutable laws of the
 system causes men's determinations and actions,
 and their determinations and actions make their
 good or bad success: their good or bad success
 therefore depends upon *themselves*. It depends upon
 their

their *actions*, which depend upon their *determinations*, which depend upon the *laws of the system*, which depend upon *God*: Therefore it depends upon themselves, and that "in the strictest sense of the word!"

3. The Doctor proceeds, "This being the case; & the apprehension that their endeavours to promote their own happiness will have a certain "and necessary effect" (even as a greater force of the main spring of a watch has a certain and necessary effect upon all the wheels and motions dependent thereon) "and that no well- (may I not add? or ill-) judged effort of their's will be lost, "will encourage them to exert themselves with "redoubled vigour;" and yet "their determinations and actions being necessary links of the "chain," and depending, as we have seen, upon the immutable laws of the system, they will exert themselves just so much as God has appointed, and neither more nor less, he being "the proper "and sole cause of all things, good and evil, natural and moral."

4. Again, (P. 97.) "with respect to the temper or disposition of the mind, (adds he) considered in a "moral respect, a man has certainly more encouragement to take pains to improve it, when he is "sensible that according to the settled constitution "and established laws of nature, it depends *entirely* "upon himself whether it be improved or not." That is, according to the settled constitution and established laws of nature, his disposition must be precisely what God has fixed and appointed, neither better nor worse, therefore it depends upon himself whether it be improved or not and he that knows and believes this system, has great encouragement to take pains to improve it! The Doctor goes on, "and that his negligence will be followed by necessary and certain ruin, whereas his "circumspection, resolution and perseverance will
"be

be attended with as certain and necessary success, things foreign to himself not interfering here as they sometimes do in the conduct of civil affairs, to disappoint the best concerted schemes." And yet "the settled constitution and established laws of nature," (things foreign to himself) or the appointment and will of God so interfere as to render his *negligence* on the one hand, or his *resolution* and *perseverance* on the other, *necessary* and *unavoidable*; nor can any scheme whatever succeed or be disappointed in matters civil any more than in those that are moral or religious, otherwise than as the will of God and the immutable laws of the system ordain.

5. But adds the Doctor, (P. 99) "though the chain of events is necessary, our own determinations and actions are necessary links of that chain. This gives the farmer the fullest assurance, that if it be decreed for him to starve, it is likewise decreed for him to neglect to sow his field, but if he do sow his field, which depends entirely upon himself," that is, his *action* depends entirely upon his *determination*, his determination upon the *laws of the system*, and these upon *God*, man being no more than "a mere instrument in the hands of the first cause, and all his motions being merely mechanical;"—if (I say) he do sow his field, that then since the laws of nature are "invariable," (and all that sow their fields are infallibly sure of having plenty of corn!) "it will be evident that no such unfavourable decree (as that he should starve) "had gone forth." In other words, as the established constitution and fundamental laws of the system lay the farmer under an *unavoidable* necessity of determining to sow his field and reap a crop, so it depends wholly on himself whether he shall so determine or not; or, as the hand of the assassin absolutely compels the

knife

knife to stab his neighbour, so it depends wholly on the *knife* whether it will stab him or not!

6. In this manner does the great and learned Dr. *Priestley* prove to a demonstration that the "system of necessity makes every man the maker of his own fortune, in a stricter sense than any other system whatever! and the belief of this, gives a man greater confidence of success in all his labours, since none of them can be in vain." This then we may be sure is one source of the great confidence Dr. *Priestley* has, that his labours shall not be in vain, but that in the end all flesh shall be *Materialists*, *Necessarians*, and *Socinians*: For as a farmer finding himself disposed to sow his field, concludes from thence that it is decreed he shall sow it, and therefore that he shall not starve ("since the laws of Nature are invariable") so Dr. *Priestley*, finding himself disposed to propagate his doctrine, infers from thence that it is decreed he shall propagate it, and that all mankind shall, by and by, believe.

7. "On the contrary (P. 99.) wherever this chain of the necessary connexion of causes and effects is broken, there *uncertainty* enters, and the idea of this is always accompanied with *indifference* or *despair*." So that, were not the Doctor certain of succeeding, he would *despair* of succeeding, knowing no medium between those two extremes, and would be *indifferent* about it, as not judging it worthy of a Philosopher to be concerned about *securing* any thing, which was not *secure* before! Thus when a young man begins business, as it is *uncertain* whether he shall succeed, so that *uncertainty* always makes him *despair* of succeeding, and *indifferent* about using all prudent and proper means in order that he may succeed; or when a racer starts for a prize, the *uncertainty* he is in, whether he shall win, makes him *despair* of winning, and *indifferent* about

out putting forth all his strength in order thereto ;
 whereas the *certainty* of winning would make him
 exert himself to the utmost, *lest he should lose*, and
 the *certainty* of succeeding in business would make
 man more diligent to *ensure* that success which
 is *sure already* !—I say again, what an admirable
 politician is this great Dr. *Priestley* ! Surely his rea-
 soning has a force in it that is irresistible ! It must
 run down all before it, and persuade all flesh to
 become *Necessarians* and, of consequence every
 thing else that is *wise and good, holy and happy* !
 B. And yet, when I recollect myself and consider
 that no event can take place but what is appointed
 and fixed by the immutable laws of the system, I
 am obliged to check this confidence and to say, if
 the laws of the system are so fixed, that all are to
 be *Necessarians* then they will be so, but if not,
 they will not be so. In like manner with regard
 to this point, as many as are appointed and neces-
 sitated to believe that this doctrine “ makes every
 man *the maker of his own fortune*, in a stricter
 sense than any other system whatever,” will
 believe so, being unavoidably impelled by the
 powerful impulses given him by the Doctor’s
 arguments ; but as for *others* who are not so
 appointed and necessitated, they perhaps may
 think that it is *Necessity*, or the *immutable laws of the*
system, or, to go deeper still, the *author and framer*
thereof, viz. *God himself*, who is the only *maker of*
every man’s fortune or misfortune ; He (it seems) being
 the proper and sole cause of all things, good and
 evil, natural and moral ” and “all things past, pre-
 sistent and to come, being precisely what he
 really intended them to be.” Not doubting but
 you will join with me in deploring the *necessitated*
and unavoidable, and therefore *inexcusable* unbelief of
 this, I again subscribe myself, Reverend Sir,

Your servant in Christ, J. B.

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LETTER IV.

L E T T E R IV.

Reverend and dear Sir,

IF you be not one of those *unbelievers*, mentioned in the close of my last letter, whom the *established constitution of nature* and the *immutable laws of the system* render impregnable to the mighty Engines devised by that great Mathematician and Philosopher Dr. *Priestley*, and the weighty arguments he has forged, for the demolition of whatever exalts itself against the universal reign of his favourite scheme of *Necessity*: if you do but happen to be one whom that established constitution and these immutable laws *necessitate* to believe his doctrine;—you must (I think) by this time be convinced of what I dare say, you had before no idea or conception, viz. That the scheme of *Necessity* “makes every man the maker of his own fortune in a stricter sense than any other system whatever.” This, I would hope, will prepare you to hear with a favourable regard, what the Doctor has to say upon another difficult point,—difficult, I mean to an *ordinary* genius, but not to a mind constructed upon so large a scale as that on which Dr. *Priestley* is formed. You have already had more than one specimen of his wonderful skill, not only in destroying the force of an apparently strong objection, but in converting that very objection into an argument in favour of his own hypothesis. In which case, one may compare him to an able *Commander* who not only finds means to render the enemies Engines of war useless to them, but by some unexpected manœuvre, even possesses himself of them and employs them against the party they were intended to support.

2. To the remarkable instance of this, I gave you in my last letter; I shall now add another no less remarkable. It concerns the subject of *prayer*. Some half thinking people, whose minds are not expanded sufficiently to enter into the Doctor's views, or take in his large and comprehensive system, will doubtless suppose that his doctrine, of *Materialism*, *Mechanism*, and *Necessity*, renders *prayer* unnecessary and unreasonable. For they will argue, that if all our motions, inward and outward, are purely mechanical, and all our tempers, words and works, as also all events whatever, fixed and established by immutable laws, according to which all things great and small, good and evil, pleasing and painful, come to pass by unavoidable necessity, so that nothing can be otherwise than it is or is to be; to what end should we pray? Will our praying be the means of *changing* any thing great or small, in *ourselves* or *others*, or in the *fixed and established* course of things?

3. How ably the Doctor answers this plausible objection, and how fully he frees his scheme from this apparent difficulty, you will see in what follows. "As our persuasion (says he *Phil. Nec. P. 100*) concerning the Doctrine of necessity cannot make any change (unless for the better) "in our conduct with respect to men, whom we must gain to our interest" "if the immutable laws of the system so appoint) "by proper conduct and address;"—the Doctor might have added and that *conduct* and *address*: these immutable laws secure to some, while the same laws necessitate others to a *contrary* conduct and address; so neither can it affect our behaviour with respect to *God*, the *mode* and *object* of our address to both, being exactly similar:" That is (if I understand him right) we are to address God exactly in the same manner, in which we address man and for the same end! And no wonder, for we are mere machines

and all our motions are equally *mechanical* and it is well known that a clock strikes in the *same manner* and for the *same purpose* before a King as before the meanest of his subjects! Surely the Doctor does not mean that God is a *mechanical Being* also, and is influenced by motives *necessarily*, as he supposes man to be; moved unavoidably by what he here calls a proper conduct and address! But perhaps he will explain himself.

4. "It is impossible (proceeds he) to suppose that there can be any difficulty attending the subject of prayer or any branch of it, upon the supposition of the doctrine of necessity, that does not equally affect it on the general supposition of God's knowing all our wants and being disposed to supply them as far as it is proper that he should do it." That is, on the supposition that God has fixed all things, *past, present, and to come* by *immutable laws*, so that nothing can be otherwise in any man's heart or life, temper or behaviour, soul or body; in the state of his health or affairs, respecting himself or family, his relations, friends or neighbours, his country or the world, the church of God or all mankind, than is already and was from the beginning *unalterably fixed and appointed*;—on *this* supposition (I say) prayer is *reasonable*, as on the general supposition of God's knowing all our wants and being disposed to supply them as far as it is proper that he should do it! I fear there are some who will not agree with the Doctor in this, but notwithstanding his positive affirmation, will still think it possible that there may be a greater difficulty in the one case than in the other. Let them, however, weigh what he further observes.

5. "It is sufficient to say, that the whole of our intercourse with the Deity is founded upon the idea of his condescending, for our good, to be

"considered

“confid^d by us in the familiar light of a Parent
 “or Governour.” And, you know Sir, all *Pa-*
rents consider their children and all *Governours* their
 subjects as *mere Machines*, necessarily and unavoid-
 ably impelled in all their motions!—In all the
commands Parents give their children and all the
laws Governours enjoin their subjects; in all the
promises they make them of reward, in case of
 obedience, and all the *threatnings* they denounce
 of punishment in case of disobedience, Parents and
 Governours still consider their children and sub-
 jects as *mechanical beings*, thinking, speaking and
 acting at all times by *absolute, unavoidable necessity*!
 And therefore they always treat them as they treat
 their *Clocks* and *Watches*, and are *no more* or *no*
otherwise displeased with, nor punish them for
 their disobedience or irregular behaviour, than they
 are displeased with and punish their *Clocks* or
Watches for going wrong! And in all the *Peti-*
tions their children or subjects present to them;
 their Parents or Governours still consider them
 as acting *mechanically*, and therefore hearken to
 their mechanical prayers just as they hearken to
 the *striking* of a clock or the *repeating* of a watch!
 Nor is any petition ever granted by Parents to their
 children nor by Governours to their subjects, but such
 as was fixed and appointed from the beginning, or
 such as the laws of mechanism render necessary
 and unavoidable!

6. The Doctor goes on “And having for our
 “good assumed those characters (of a Parent and a
 “Governour) he will certainly realize them by
 “requiring of us, (though necessitated to the con-
 “trary!) such behaviour as wise Parents require
 “of their children and wise Governours of their
 “subjects. Now wise Parents often justly refuse
 “to supply the wants of their children till they
 “solicit for it with a proper temper of mind.”

Just as a wise man refuses to meddle with his Clock or employ any person to make any alteration in its parts or movements, till he hears it *soliciting* him by striking irregularly !

7. But "having considered this subject of prayer in his Institutes of natural and revealed religion," the *Doctor* forbears to enlarge upon it here and "only presents us with a different view that Mr. *Hobbes* has given of the subject, on the supposition "of prayer not being the *cause* or the *proper means*," "of procuring any favour from God; his conduct "towards us being determined on other accounts." Mr. *Hobbes* must certainly be right in this view of prayer. For if the great Machine of nature be formed and all its motions fixed by immutable laws so that all things past, present and to come happen by *absolute, unavoidable necessity*, it is certain prayer cannot be "the *cause* or *proper means* of procuring any favour from God, his conduct towards us being determined on other accounts," even by the *course of nature* which he has established and the *immutable laws* which he has fixed. Let us therefore hear this gentleman, Mr. *Hobbes*, for he seems to have got hold on the right thread. "Thanksgiving (says he) "is no cause of the blessing past, and that which is "past is *sure* and *necessary*; yet even among men "thanks are in use, as an acknowledgment of "benefits past, though we should expect no new "benefit for our gratitude, and prayer to God "Almighty is but thanksgiving for God's blessings "in general; and though it precedes the particular "thing we ask, yet it is not a *cause* or *means* of it, "but a signification that we expect nothing from "God, but in such a manner as he, not we will."

8. This, Dear Sir, is surely the very thing: all things being fixed by immutable laws and the established constitution of nature having already made provision for every thing and determined every thing
good

good and evil, natural and moral, we must not *pray* we must only *give thanks*. For things *to come* are as *sure* and *necessary* as things *past* and our praying about them will neither be the means of altering them in the smallest degree, nor of rendering them in any respect more *sure* or *necessary*. We have therefore only to acknowledge this their *certainly* and *necessity*; and this kind of prayer we may extend to *all* things, to things *evil* as well as *good*, to things *moral* as well as *natural*; and under the conviction we have that "*whatever is, is right*," and "that all things, past, present and to come are precisely what the author of nature really intended them to be," we may give thanks for *vices* as well as *virtues*, and praise God for every act of theft and robbery, adultery and murder that we see committed from day to day. For these things are all right, and in them the will of God is exactly done. So that this is a wonderful improvement of the subject indeed!

9. *Prayer* used to be offered for things *good* but it may equally as well be offered for things *evil*; and whereas it was wont to be confined to the *righteous* or those that *desired* to be so, under a notion that *God heareth not sinners*, persisting in sin; it may with equal propriety be extended to the *wicked*; yea the Devil himself may pray, and persuaded that "*Whatever is, is right*" may say in the words that Milton has put into his mouth

—" *Evil be thou my good!* "

And in this, the *vilest* of men may join with the *vilest* of angels (as indeed they do daily) and say *drunkenness* be thou my good! *Whoredom* be thou my good! *Adultery* and *Murder* be ye my good! A way of praying this, which they will not need to be much exhorted to, as it flows spontaneously from the constitution of their nature and indeed is, according to the doctrine we have now under consideration, *necessary* and *unavoidable*. And then, what

what is a mighty advantage, to pray in this manner is always to pray with success! For nature *must* and *will* have its course and the immutable laws of the system *must* and *will* be observed.

10. Indeed, if any were to be so *ignorant* or *perverse* as to set themselves to oppose this stream of nature, of law, system, appointment, determination, decree, fate, necessity, or whatever other name learned and philosophical Doctors may think proper to give it;—if any were to *presume* to conceive a *wish* that any thing might be *otherwise* than it has *been*, *is* and *is to be*, and to pray that they might not feel the desires after wine and women, after fornication and adultery, theft and robbery, which they *have felt* and *do feel*, and *were* and *are* and *shall be necessitated* to feel; then, indeed in that case they would certainly pray without success; because they would pray *amiss*: praying that they might not feel the *lusts* and *passions* which according to the established constitution of nature and the fixed unalterable laws of the system, they are under an *absolute, unavoidable necessity* of feeling.

11. But let all *pray*, or (to speak more properly as Mr. Hobbes does,) *give thanks* aright and acknowledge that “the liberty of man in doing what he will, is accompanied with the necessity of doing what God will and no more nor less,” and therefore whatever is, is right. “Let all endeavour to enter into the schemes of these great Philosophers, and, getting their minds expanded to take in this comprehensive system, “see God in every thing, “and every thing in God,” and they will never pray in vain: they will always be heard and always answered! I do not say God will hear and answer them. No: there is no need that *He* or any intelligent being should interfere at all in the matter: The *established constitution* of nature will answer them, the *immutable laws of the system* will answer

answer them; the fixed appointment of all things, *fate* or *necessity* will answer them, and will answer them so *certainly*, that the constitution of nature, the law^s of the system, and even *fate* and *necessity* themselves are not more *fixed* and *certain* than will be their answers to these *wis*: and *holy* prayers, in which they have the honour of joining with Lord *Kaims*, Mr. *Hobbs*, Mr. *Hume*, Dr. *Priestley* and divers other great and learned Philosophers, as also the bulk of mankind in all ages and even with Beings of an *higher order* whom I will not name!

12. It appears therefore, both from the light in which Dr. *Priestley* hath placed the subject of *Prayer*, and that in which Mr. *Hobbs* hath placed it, that we may quite agree with the Doctor and rest "satisfied (P. 102.) that it can only be in consequence of some gross mis-stating of the case, if "the belief of the doctrine of necessity appear to "have in any respect, an unfavourable influence "upon the mind," for "that in a variety of respects, "it cannot but be apparent, it must have the happiest and noblest effects imaginable;" viz. such effects as the constitution of nature and the laws of the system have appointed, *fixed* and rendered *necessary* and *unavoidable*, that it should have; But the Doctor "purposely confines himself to what "has been thought most *unpromising* in the system "that he has adopted, and what is generally esteemed to be the *dark* and *dangerous side* of the "principle. And if even this view of it be favourable to it," and its *dark* and *dangerous* side shed such *light* and *glory*, and afford such *protection* and *safety*, "what may we not expect from other views "of this doctrine, which all the world must allow "to be highly advantageous!" With this pleasing thought I conclude my letter, as the Doctor concludes his *Section*, and hoping that what you have already seen will excite your curiosity to look a little

little further into this improving subject and that I shall obtain your permission to address you again upon it, I now release you, and am

Reverend Sir

Your obedient servant,

J. B.

LETTER V.

L E T T E R V.

Reverend and dear Sir,

THE light and glory which the refined reasoning and conclusive arguments of Dr. Priestly had cast upon some of the "dark and unpromising" parts of his system, induced me to fix my attention upon some other of those parts, and I immediately perceived that he had shed a peculiar lustre upon a point, which before had appeared impenetrable as midnight. The point, I mean, is, how this doctrine of *Materialism*, *Mechanism* and *Necessity* could consist with what Reason and Scripture manifestly hold forth, and is taken for granted in all civilized nations in the world, and is the foundation of all civil government, viz. that mankind are *accountable for their actions*, and are proper subjects of *rewards and punishments*.

2. If man be a being wholly *material*, thought I; if his very *mind* be nothing but a piece of mechanism; if all his motions be purely *mechanical*, *necessary* and *unavoidable*; if all his *determinations*, and all his *actions* be appointed and fixed by unalterable laws, so that they could not possibly be otherwise than they have been, are and are to be; how can it be proper or reasonable to give him *rules*, for the regulation of his conduct, to *punish* him when he breaks those rules, or to *reward* him when he observes them?

While I thought on this subject and revolved it this way and that, in my mind, attracted (*irresistibly* and *necessarily*, no doubt) by the clear shining of Dr. Priestly's reasoning and the dazzling splendour of his argument, I cast my eye upon P. 73, of the
book

book often referred to already, viz. *Philosophical Necessity*, and there found the difficulty cleared up and the dark point elucidated.

3. "The objection to the doctrine of necessity" (says he) which has weighed the most with those who "have considered the subject, is, that if men's "determinations and actions flow necessarily "from the previous state (mechanism) of their "minds, and the motives or influences to which they "are exposed, the idea of *responsibility* or *accountability* vanishes, and there can be no propriety or "use of rewards or punishments." Now you must know Sir, that this objection to the doctrine arises, from our ignorance, or from not getting "our minds "expanded" sufficiently to take in all the parts of this large and comprehensive system, which perhaps, it may not be easy to do, as they may be "constructed" (as the *Doctor's* phrase is) upon a smaller plan, and cast in a narrower mold than such capacious minds as those of Dr. Priestley, Dr. J. B., and the Reverend Theophilus Lindsey, not to mention Lord Kaims, Mr. Hume, and Dr. Hartley, the "Mechanism of whose minds" however is now taken to pieces again, so that, at present they contain no system or shred of any system whatever!

4. But, be this as it will (or as necessity requires) the Doctor (P. 74.) "makes it appear that when the "case is rightly understood, there can be no use "or propriety of rewards or punishments on any "other scheme but the greatest possible upon this." Did not I tell you, Sir, that he had the wonderful art of wrestling the sword from the enemy's hand and fighting him with his own weapon; Of turning even a forcible objection into a convincing argument? Surely nothing will be impossible to this extraordinary genius! but he will be able to prove that even *Immanuel, God with us*, is but a

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mere man, that is, on his principles, a mere machine, and that the *Father of spirits himself is material!* But after the evidence we meet with in every page of his ability in argumentation, and that he certainly proves every thing he undertakes, and asserts nothing which he does not *demonstrate*, we cannot doubt for a moment, his making this matter perfectly clear. We shall doubtless be pleased with the ingenuity discovered in the invention and arrangement of his arguments, while we are instructed by the arguments themselves, and charmed with the masterly reasoning, whereby with regular steps, he advances to the wonderful conclusion, which joins extremes so remote from each other, and reconciles things, so universally deemed irreconcilable!

5. "In order to make this (matter) clearly apprehended (ibid.) he supposes two minds" (one mechanical and the other not) "constructed upon the principles of the two opposite schemes of liberty and necessity; all the determinations of the one being invariably" (and unavoidably) "directed by its previous dispositions and the motives presented to it, while the other has a power of determining, in all cases, in a manner independent of any such previous disposition or motives;" which he takes to be "precisely the difference between the system of *necessity* and *liberty*, philosophically and strictly defined. To avoid circumlocution he calls the former A. and the latter B. He farther supposes himself to be a father and these two his children, and knowing their inward make and constitution, considers how he should treat them." His object (observe P. 75.) is to make them *virtuous* and happy: which would seem to be an arduous undertaking with regard to his son A, he being no more than a piece of mere mechanism, necessarily and unavoidably

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impelled

impelled and determined in all his volitions and actions by surrounding objects and the ideas they occasion, and therefore, to appearance, as little capable of virtue as a billiard ball. As to the *other*, tho' his mind is "constructed" too, as his phrase is, yet as he is possessed of a *self-determining power* and therefore is free to choose *vice* or *virtue*, *good* or *evil*, the matter does not seem to be so difficult. And yet (to convince us how incapable we are of judging in such matters, and how far Dr. Priestley's thoughts are above our thoughts!) the *former* is the only one with whom he succeeds, while he can make nothing at all of the latter, the *self-determining power* counteracting all his endeavours and rendering his schemes abortive; at least, he can make nothing of him till, turning his *soul* out of his *body*, he wholly discharges that *power* and makes him as mere a machine as his elder brother.

6. But to proceed: "All his precepts and the whole of his discipline, therefore, are directed to that end," viz. to make his two sons virtuous and happy. "For the use of discipline is, by the hope of something that the subjects of it *know* to be good, or the fear of something they know to be evil, to engage them to act in such a manner, as the person who has the conduct of that discipline well knows to be for their good *ultimately*, though they cannot see it. In other words, he must make use of *present good* and *present evil*, in order to secure their future and greatest good; the former being within the apprehension of his children, and the latter lying beyond it and being known to himself only." You will easily observe, dear Sir, how exceeding applicable this just account of *discipline* is to a being purely mechanical such as his son A! For as all his determinations and actions are appointed and fixed by immutable laws, so that they can only be as they are

to be ; as his *virtue* and *happiness*, or *vice* and *misery* are already determined, *certain*, *necessary* and *unavoidable* ; it must be exceeding proper to endeavour “ by the hope of something he knows to be good, “ or the fear of something he knows to be evil, to “ engage him to act in such a manner as will be for “ his good ultimately,” and by “ making use of “ present good or present evil to *secure* ” (as much as lieth in the Doctor) what was *secured* by the established constitution of nature and the immutable laws of the system, or rendered *impossible*, viz. “ his future and greatest good ! ” And you will observe too, that if virtue or vice can be said to belong to a piece of mere mechanism, the undertaking, instead of being *arduous*, as I said above, may happen to be very easy, if so be that the established constitution of nature and the immutable laws of the system be *for* instead of being *against* him. So that our prospect brightens upon us as we proceed, and instead of finding it a matter of *great difficulty* (as I thought) to make this elder son virtuous and happy, it may chance to be *impossible* he should be *otherwise* !

7. But let us not take the business out of the Doctor's hands ; he best understands the mechanism of his son's mind and in what manner it may be brought to the proper level of virtue and happiness. “ Now since motives,” (says he *ibid.*) good or bad ; “ have a certain and necessary influence “ on the mind of A. I know that the prospect of “ good will certainly incline him to do what I “ recommend ; ” — unless the established constitution of nature and the immutable laws of the system determine him to believe he shall attain still *greater* or to him more *desirable* good, by gratifying his *lust*, *covetousness* or *ambition* ; and “ that the fear “ of evil will deter him from any thing that I wish “ to dissuade him from ; ” unless the same constitution

of nature and the same laws of the system represent it to him as a still greater evil to restrain his *lusts* and *vices*, "I bring him under the course of discipline above described, with the greatest hopes of success;" may assured of it, if the established constitution of nature and the immutable laws of the system be on my side, but, if not, despairing of it. For "other influences," such as those which have just been mentioned and which are the proper and sole causes of all our *determinations* and all our *actions*, of the *Doct.r's*, in disciplining his son, and of his son's, in improving by that discipline, "other influences, may counteract my views, and thereby my object may be frustrated" and this darling child A. (beloved the more for being *wholly* made of *matter*, without *spirit*) though possessed of no self-determining and unruly power, be neither *virtuous* nor *happy*.

8. "But notwithstanding this, (he assures us) "his discipline will likewise have its certain and "necessary effect," being one link in the strong adamant chain of necessity, even such an effect as the established constitution of nature and the immutable laws of the system give it; "counter-acting, in part at least," if the laws of the system, are so framed, "all foreign and unfavourable influence," save the influence of these laws, which is *universal, constant* and *irresistible*, descending to the most minute event, and giving birth to every thought and desire, temper, word and work. "Every promise, every threatening, every reward and "every punishment, judiciously" (I add or *injudiciously*) "administered works to his end," as far as Necessity ordains, as a link in the indissoluble chain. And "if this discipline be sufficient to overcome "any foreign influence," suppose the influence of the above mentioned *immutable laws* (should they be against it) the point is gained, and without applying

plying to God at all or being beholden to him for any help in the matter, he "engages his son in a "train of proper actions;" in which "by means of "the mechanical structure of his mind," possessed of no self-determining power to turn him aside to the right hand or to the left, he runs straight forward, till there be "formed a stable habit which "insures his success."

9. You see therefore, dear Sir, he attains his end with respects to his son A. He is made both virtuous and happy, if the established constitution of nature and the immutable laws of the system have rendered it *necessary* and *unavoidable* that he should be so: But if that constitution of nature, and these laws have ordained that he shall be vicious and miserable, he still will be so; and as he will be most *inexcusable* for not conquering that *unconquerable* constitution and resisting these *irresistible* laws, he will be most justly punished by Dr. Priestley the *father of his flesh*, on earth and Jehovah (I had almost said, the *father of his spirit*, but I recollect he has no *spirit*) in Hell! Now Sir, we are to remember that the Doctor supposed the mechanism of the mind of his son A. to be "constructed "on the very plan, on which he has shewn in his *Philos. Disq.* that the minds of all are constructed; what therefore he has so fully demonstrated concerning his son A. may with equal clearness be demonstrated of all mankind. They all *are or will be* made both *virtuous* and *happy*, with (or without) proper discipline, if the established constitution of nature and the immutable laws of the system render it necessary and unavoidable that they should be so! At present, indeed, appearances are against it; but what does not take place *now* may take place hereafter, and what prisons, gallowses and gibbets do not effect on earth with regard to these, it would seem, *badly constructed Machines*, the prison

and fire of Hell may effect with respect to those *better contrived Machines* which are to be built of incorruptible materials at the great resurrection-day. Though indeed when I recollect myself, I acknowledge the pieces of mechanism to be constructed at the day of judgment cannot be more regular in their motions than *these*, which have never swerved an hair's breadth from the established constitution of their nature, the immutable laws of the system and the wise and holy will of God. Nevertheless, *Necessity* so ordaining, they are to be demolished by death as a punishment of their irregularity, and to be raised up again hereafter to be punished more severely in Hell, that by this means they may be forced into regularity and order! As I cannot afford to give you a great quantity *at once* of what is so very precious, I break off here, and subscribe myself,

Reverend Sir,

Your obliged Friend

and Servant,

J. B

LETTER VI.

L E T T E R VI.

Reverend and dear Sir,

HAVING got a little leisure, I take up my pen again to remind you that (P. 76.) "in his son B. Dr. Priestley has to do with a creature of quite another make," a creature that is not wholly *material* but partly *spir. tual*; that has a *soul* in his body, and is possessed of a *self-determining power*, a liberty of choice and action; A creature this, whose determinations and actions are not *fixed* and rendered *necessary* and *unavoidable*, but when he *determines*, he does it *freely*, having it in his power to determine otherwise, and when he *acts* he acts *freely* having it in his power to act otherwise. "Motives" therefore though, if he be wise, he will attend to, consider and deliberately weigh them, yet "have no *necessary* or *certain* influence upon his determinations." They do not influence him *necessarily*, because that would be contrary to that *freedom* which God hath given him: when he yields to their influence he does it under a consciousness that he might resist it, being under no *unavoidable* necessity of yielding to it. And, accordingly at one time he has yielded to, and at another, has resisted the *very same motive* in the *very same circumstances*. And motives have no *certain* influence upon his determinations and actions, because that would imply their being *mechanical* and *unavoidable* which they are not.

2. Hence in many cases, as the Doctor expresses it, "it is exactly an equal chance whether his promises or threatenings, his rewards and punishments determine his sons actions or not." Only when he promises him a reward in case of obedience, or threatens to punish him in case of disobedience

dience, he knows he is not laid under an *absolute in-apacity* of obeying, or an *unavoidable necessity* of disobeying, from the established constitution of nature and the immutable laws of the system. He knows when he *obys*, when he determines wisely and acts virtuously, he might have done otherwise, and that when he *disobeys*, determines foolishly and acts wickedly, he might have obeyed, and therefore that *he himself*, and not any established constitution of nature or immutable laws of the system, is the proper cause of his own wise or foolish determinations, and virtuous or vicious actions; acknowledging however the aid of divine grace in the one, and the influence of Satan's temptations in the other.

3. Now this being the case, my dull head, would have inferred here-from that this younger son B. was *responsible* for his determinations and actions and a proper subject of rewards and punishments, and the other not. But Dr. Priestley, whose thoughts are as far above my thoughts, as his system of *Materialism*, *Mechanism*, and *Necessity* is above any system I ever could have devised or imagined, Dr. Priestley (I say) draws a directly contrary inference. And because this younger son B. has an *intelligent* and *free* spirit in him, and both determines and acts, not from unavoidable necessity, but *freely*, having it in his power to determine and act otherwise, infers that he is *not* responsible for his conduct nor a proper subject of rewards and punishments. But that the elder son A. who, as we have seen, is a *mere body* without a *soul*, a mere piece of mechanism, all whose determinations and actions are as mechanical as the motions of a clock, all appointed and fixed before he was born, *necessary* and *unavoidable*, that *he* and *he alone*, is responsible for his conduct and a proper subject of rewards and punishments.

4. But

4. But let the Doctor proceed and bring the matter to the desired conclusion; let him demonstrate that without *necessity* there could be no *possibility* and that if our determinations and actions were not *mechanical* and *unavoidable*, they could neither be *praise-worthy* and *rewardable* nor *blame-worthy* and *punishable*. "This self-determining power (says he P. 77.) is not at all of the nature of any mechanical influence" (what a pity!) "that may be counteracted by influences equally mechanical, but is a thing with respect to which I" (a mechanical being and well skilled in estimating mechanical powers) "can make no sort of calculation, and against which I can make no provision," having no idea of any influence but that of *matter upon matter*, acting by mechanical laws. "Even the longest continued series of proper actions will form no habit that can be (*absolutely* and without *divine grace*) "depended upon, but "after all my labours and anxiety my object", viz. the virtue and happiness of my son B. "is quite precarious and uncertain;" unless I importunately beg of God to give him grace and he, in answer to prayer interpose and by his word and spirit enlighten his mind, that he may clearly see his *duty* to be his *happiness*, and hereby subdue his will and win his affections over to piety and virtue, not indeed *necessarily* and *unavoidably*, but rationally and freely; in which case his service being a *free-will offering*, would be the less acceptable! whereas with respect to my son A, this is unnecessary because "all his influences being mechanical may (as I can easily conceive) be counteracted by influences equally mechanical," so that I need not ask of God any supernatural grace for him: nature alone can and will do all; can and will make him *necessarily* and *unavoidably* *virtuous* and *happy* or *vicious* and *miserable*.

5. The

5. The Doctor goes on : " If we suppose that B. " is in some degree determined by motives," as every intelligent creature must be, suppose by a regard to the glory of God and his own good, only not *necessarily* and *unavoidably* and much more not *mechanically*, " in that very degree and in no other, " is he a proper subject of discipline ; and he can " never become wholly so, till " (his soul being turned out of his body) " his self-determining " power is entirely discharged and he comes to be " the same kind of being with A." consisting " wholly of matter as a river does of water or a " forest of trees. " Hence the Doctor assures (*ibid*) that " had he the making of his own children (what " a pity he had not !) they should certainly all be " constituted like A." of mere matter, without spirit, that they might be as manageable as a billiard ball ; " and none of them like B ; " the *self-determining power*, being so unruly and uncertain a principle of action, a principle, which a materialist, acquainted with *no* powers but such as are *mechanical*, can make nothing at all of. And hence we must infer, as the Doctor's judgment is undoubtedly right, and *God's thoughts are his thoughts*, that not only his children, but all mankind are most certainly constituted in this manner, and consist *wholly* of matter, all their thoughts, desires, tempers, words and actions, being *mechanical*, *necessary* and *unavoidable*.

6. Excuse me, dear Sir, if I interrupt the sweet story, to express a wish here, that the Doctor had been present when a plan was laid for the Creation of angels, that by his *Philosophical Disquisitions*, and predictions of "*Corruptions*" he might have prevented the Creation of beings possessed of a *self-determining power*, who it seems, through that power, have introduced evil into God's works and both apostatized themselves and drawn mankind to be partakers

partakers in their apostacy! But alas the constitution of nature and the immutable laws of the system had determined that he should not then be born. But to return.

7. "The discipline of A. (says he P. 78.) will "have a suitable influence upon all that are constituted like him," that are wholly made of matter, as he is; "so that for *their* sakes," lest they should miss of that virtue and happiness which the established constitution of nature and the immutable laws of the system render *certain*, or that they may escape that vice and misery which the same constitution of nature and laws of the system render *necessary* and *unavoidable*, I say "for their sakes, as well "as on account of A. himself, he ought to bring his "children under this salutary treatment. And thus all "the ends of discipline are answered, and rewards and "punishments have the greatest propriety, because "they have the fullest effect upon the doctrine "necessary; whereas it is evident they are absolutely *lost*, having no effect *whatever* on the opposite "scheme," viz. that of *liberty*. These are the Doctor's own words, and as we may be perfectly sure of their *certain truth* and *deep importance*, I infer from them that the world has suffered much loss from Dr. *Priestley's* not having flourished in the early ages of mankind. For whereas in instituting civil government and ordaining laws enforced with sanctions, they have always proceeded on the supposition, (now found to be *false*) of *human liberty* and of a *self-determining power* in man; it now appears by the clear reasoning and evident demonstrations of Dr. *Priestley*, or at least by his plain and peremptory *assertions*, that they have "absolutely "lost all their labour, their discipline, rewards and "punishments having had no effect whatever!"

8. And now, dear Sir, as I am about to conclude my letter, and should be sorry to leave you
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in grief; as a remedy for the distress which you must feel in reflecting how much unnecessary trouble *Kings* and *Kingdoms*, *Judges* and *Senators* have had, which they might have escaped had Dr. *Priestley* appeared sooner; let me remind you of the grand and sure maxim of this sage Philosophy "*Whatever is, is right*:" And let me intreat you to thank the established constitution of nature and the immutable laws of the system, for reserving him to bless the concluding part of the eighteenth Century of the Christian *Æra*; a period in which the same constitution of nature and immutable laws have well ordered that we should be born, and enjoy the reviving influence of his salutary doctrine! But let us not be content to rejoice in it ourselves only: let us endeavour to diffuse the grateful and healing fragrance far and near. And if we can do no more, let us at least wish, that not only our own country, but that *Kings* and *Kingdoms* all over the earth would hearken to him and establish the whole plan of their government upon a new bottom, upon the threefold basis of *Materialism*, *Mechanism*, and *Necessity*, and thereon erect *Soinianism* by a law. But I forget myself: *wishing* is needless, and indeed would answer no end: They will be sure to do it, if the *Motives* be sufficiently strong, and the established constitution of nature so ordain; "*all things past, present and to come* being absolutely fixed," and it being "*impossible any event should be otherwise than it has been, is, and is to be.*"

I remain as usual,

Reverend Sir,

Yours at command.

J. B.

LETTER VII.

L E T T E R VII.

Reverend and dear Sir,

TO shew you that I am not unmindful of the exhortation I made bold to give in the conclusion of my last letter; but that I am willing to contribute *my mite* towards the spreading of this *most rational and comfortable* doctrine, I now sit down to inform you, that, though the *Doctor* "does not think it necessary to add any more (P. 79.) on this subject:" yet "because this question has been rendered obscure by an unfair and improper manner of stating it, he gives another view of it, by which he hopes it will appear there is all the foundation we could wish for a proper *accountableness* and for praise and blame upon the doctrine of *necessity*, and not so much as a shadow of any real foundation for them upon any other supposition; the boasted advantage of the doctrine of liberty, belonging in fact to the doctrine of necessity only:" And he "is confident that his ideas on this subject are at the same time those of the vulgar, and agreeable to sound Philosophy." For it is evident the vulgar, one and all, consider themselves as *mere machines*, bodies without souls, all whose determinations and actions are necessary and unavoidable! and it is certain that *sound Philosophy* uniformly teaches, viz. in the writings of Lord Kaimes, Mr. Hume, Dr. Priestley and many others, that matter *can think* and has in itself a principle of *self motion*! The Doctor goes on "While those (the ideas) of the Metaphysicians, who have adopted a contrary opinion," (the opinion of an

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intelligent

intelligent Spirit in man, possessed of a self-determining power) "are founded on a mere falacy."

2. Observe, Sir, how clearly the Doctor makes this appear. "When I, or the world at large (P. 80.) praise my son A." (for doing what he could not avoid) "we tell him we admire his excellent disposition"—that is, the excellent mechanism of his mind, so admirably constructed, that "all good motives have a certain and never failing influence upon it, always" (*necessarily and unavoidably*) "determining his choice to what is virtuous and honourable;"—unless when the same mechanism of his mind, necessarily and unavoidably determines his choice to what is vicious and disgraceful; "and that his conduct is not directed either by mere will," however *intelligent and upright*, "or the authority of any other person," however just and reasonable; but by the established constitution of nature and the immutable laws of the system, which render all that he does and says necessary and unavoidable: so that his conduct good or bad (for it is either one or the other as necessity ordains) "proceeds from his virtuous (or vicious) disposition only," (that is from the good or bad mechanism of his mind) "and that his good (or bad) habits, are so confirmed that neither promises nor threatenings are able to draw him aside from his duty," or his *sin*, both being equally *necessary and unavoidable*!

3. Thus to compare great things with small, when I or the world at large praise a piece of ground, we say we admire its excellent quality, in consequence of which all good cultivation has a certain and never failing influence upon it, always causing it to bring forth good fruit; and that its fruitfulness proceeds from its own good quality only, &c. For as the *ground* and the *boy* act equally mechanically

it is proper they should both be praised in similar language.

4. "In this representation the Doctor is confident that he keeps back nothing that is essential, the ideas of mankind never going beyond this when they praise any person;" for they never suppose that the persons they praise could possibly have done otherwise, could possibly have omitted the good they do, or have committed the evil they avoid: They *always* believe and take for granted, that when a man acts honestly and does generous and liberal actions, he is actuated by *unavoidable necessity*; and that when a man breaks into his neighbour's house and cuts his throat, he was so powerfully and *necessarily* impelled by the established constitution of nature and the immutable laws of the system that he could not possibly have done otherwise! "And philosophically speaking," Dr. Priestley assures us their ideas ought not to go any further. "For praise that is founded on any other principle," (suppose the principle of *free agency*, which implies that he who acts virtuously, had it in his power to have acted viciously,) "is, says the Doctor, really absurd and if it were understood by the vulgar would be reprobated by them." (as all absurd things always are!) "as certainly repugnant to their conceptions of it." For they are, we and all clearly of opinion, a man ought not to be praised for doing any thing, unless his doing it were *unavoidable*, and he acted from *absolute, irresistible necessity*! Such is the conclusive reasoning of Dr. Priestley! Such the arguments that carry conviction to the minds of thousands! Surely, Sir, you feel their force, and like all the world, will become a Materialist, Necessarian and Socinian before you die!

5. But let us hear the Doctor out. "This will clearly appear (says he) by considering the case

“ of my son B. We have supposed (P. 81.) that
 “ A. has done a virtuous action, and has been com-
 “ mended,” (as a piece of ground is commended)
 “ because it proceeded from the ” (necessary,
 unavoidable) “ bent of his mind to virtue,” (the
 mechanism of his mind being so constructed that he
 should have that bent) “ so that whenever proper
 “ circumstances occurred, he necessarily did what
 “ we wished him to have done,” and could no
 more do otherwise, than a tree formed to grow
 straight can grow crooked. “ Let us now suppose
 “ that B. does the very same thing: but let it be
 “ fully understood that the cause of his right deter-
 “ mination was not,” the established constitution
 of nature or the immutable laws of the system con-
 structing the mechanism of his mind so that it *ne-*
cessarily and unavoidably had “ a bias or disposition
 “ in favour of virtue, or because a good motive”
necessarily and unavoidably “ influenced him to do
 “ it; but (let it be understood) that his determina-
 “ tion was produced by something within himself,
 “ call it by what name you please,” (suppose an in-
 intelligent and free spirit, possessed of a *self-determining*
 power or liberty of choice and action). “ of a quite
 “ different nature,” from any mechanical impulse,
 “ with respect to which motives of any kind have
 “ no sort of” *necessitating, compelling* “ influence or
 “ effect!—and I apprehend” as he acted right
 without being *necessitated* to do it, when he might
 have acted wrong, “ he would no more be thought
 “ a proper subject of praise (says the Doctor) not-
 “ withstanding he should do what was right than
 “ the dice which by a fortunate throw should give a
 “ man an estate.”

6. But here I must beg leave to correct a little
 mistake in the comparison the Doctor has made use
 of, to illustrate his argument. B. we are to re-
 member is supposed to be possessed of an *intelligent*
 and

and free spirit or a self-determining power: To make the simile proper therefore, we must suppose the dice to possess this principle; and, not to be thrown by another, (in which case it would rather resemble the elder son A. who never *throws himself*, but is always *thrown* by the established constitution of nature and the immutable laws of the system, having no more self-determining power in him than a billiard ball) I say we may suppose the dice to *throw itself*—as B. always determines himself, and then it would read thus, “B. would no more be thought a proper subject of praise, notwithstanding he should do what was right, than the dice which, possessed of an intelligent and free spirit and acting from consideration and choice, should, by fortunately throwing itself, give a man an estate.” “It is true (adds the *Doctor*) the action was right,” the throw was fortunate, “but” (as the dice *threw itself* and was not thrown by another) “there was “not the proper principle and motive, which are “the only just foundations of praise,” viz. *materialism*, *mechanism*, and *necessity*, without which, in the *Doctor's* account, there can be nothing excellent or praise-worthy in any person or thing!

7. So that you see, Reverend Sir, the matter is perfectly clear. (P. 84.) “Punishment would have “no propriety or use, upon the doctrine of *philosophical liberty*,” but only on that of *philosophical necessity*, it being always quite improper to punish a man for doing a thing, when he *might have avoided doing it*, and only then proper to punish him when his doing it was *unavoidable*, and it being always quite *useless* to punish people for committing crimes when they are at liberty to *avoid* committing them for the future, and only *then* useful to punish them when they are not at liberty in that respect, and the punishing them can do them no good! The reason is, the same established

constitution of nature and immutable laws of the system which insure their *committing crimes*, insure also their being *punished* for those crimes, the one being as necessary and unavoidable as the other, both being linked together in the adamantine chain of *necessity*!

I. And here let me stop to congratulate the happy state of my fellow creatures, born under this excellent "constitution of nature" and subject to these admirable "laws of the system," which first necessitate them to commit crimes and then to be punished for those crimes, which ordain them *first to unavoidable sin on earth and then to unavoidable torment in Hell!* Oh! ye thieves, highwaymen, robbers, murderers, who are confined in crowds in Newgate, and are expiring in troops at Tyburn, I congratulate your happiness! Your crimes and your punishments were to you equally *unavoidable*, equally indissoluble links of *one chain!* The established constitution of nature and the immutable laws of the system rendered it necessary you should do those things and then be hanged and gibbeted for them! "Your liberty in doing what you would" (supposing in picking men's pockets, breaking into their houses, and cutting their throats) "was always accompanied with the necessity of doing what God would and no less nor more." Nay and you "never had any appetite, passion or temper of which God's will was not the cause!" And now you are hanged and gibbeted for fulfilling the irresistible will of God, and obeying the fundamental laws of the system! But this need not distress you, for you are but *bodies without souls!* mere *pieces of mechanism!* and whether a clock has gone well or ill, its maker has a right to take it down when he will and how he will, and put its parts to what use he pleases, even to refine them in the fiercest fire, if he see fit so to do. I wish indeed

need that you were as devoid of *feeling* as a Clock. But it is, as it is, and you must be content! One thing Dr. *Priestley* can assure you of, for your comfort: you shall drop into a state of utter insensibility the moment the halter has done its office, and shall remain in that state, perhaps for some hundreds of years! Would to God you might remain in it for ever! But that cannot be. Either in the *ordinary course of nature*, and in consequence of the peculiar situation the earth will be in, through the general conflagration, or by an extraordinary act of omnipotence, (the *Declarer* is not certain which see *Disq.* P. 239.) you shall again spring out of the earth, like mushrooms, the mechanism of your minds will be restored, and you must be tried over again at the bar of another judge for crimes which, through the established constitution of nature and the immutable laws of the system, were to you *absolutely unavoidable*, and for which you were hanged and gibbeted on earth, but for which *this Judge*, much more terrible and severe than *he* before whom you trembled at the Assizes, will doom you to punishment much more dreadful, even to a torment the *smoke of which ascendeth up for ever and ever!*

9. But to return. "*Blame* also upon the same scheme (viz. of liberty, P. 84.) would be equally "*absurd and ill-founded.*" As it would be quite *absurd and ill-founded* to blame any man for doing what he might have avoided: and only *reasonable and proper* to blame a man for doing what he could not avoid! "For, if my child A." who you remember is a mere machine and all his actions purely mechanical) "*acts wrong*, I tell him, that" in as much as he was not at liberty to act otherwise, "I am exceedingly displeased, because he has shewn "*a disposition,*" (that is mechanism) "*of mind,*" to him unavoidable, "*on which motives to virtue* "*have no sufficient influence; that he appears to* "*have*

"have such a propensity to vicious indulgencies, "that I am afraid he is irreclaimable," the established constitution of nature and the immutable laws of the system having so ordained, and "that his "utter ruin will be the consequence." Exactly so, if this same child A. happen to be ill of a *dropsy*, the Doctor tells him "he is *exceedingly displeased* because he has shewn a disposition of body on which medicines have no sufficient influence, and that he appears to have such a propensity to drop-sical complaints, he is afraid he is incurable and that utter loss of health or even *death* will be the consequence." For the case is entirely parallel; the *sin* is as unavoidable as the *sickness*, and this mechanical child A. can no more help the one than the other.

10. Accordingly, the Doctor tells us (P. 115.) "The distinction between things *natural* and *moral*, "entirely ceases on the scheme of necessity, and "the vices of men come under the class of common evils," such as dropsies or fevers, "producing misery for a time; but like all other evils in "the same great system, are ultimately subservient "to greater good." The Doctor's displeasure therefore at his son A. is of the *same kind* whether he *sins* or is *sick*, whether he tells a lye, or is ill of a fever, and he expresses his displeasure in similar language. And in as much as all parents do the same, therefore the point is proved, the doctrine is ascertained, and *Blame*, as well as praise "is absurd and ill-founded" on any scheme except that of *Materialism*, *Mechanism* and *Necessity*.

11. Once more (P. 85.) "If the constitution of "B. be attended to," viz. that he is possessed of an *intelligent* and *free* spirit, a *self-determining* power," "it will be seen that *blame* is equally *absurd* as "punishment is unavailing — It is true that he has "done what is wrong, and it must have had bad "consequences

“consequences; but it was not from any *bad disposition* (the *Doctor* should have said *Mechanism* as before) of mind, that made him subject to be (unavoidably) influenced by bad impressions. No: his determination had a cause of quite another nature. It was a *choice*” (which he was under no kind of necessity of making, being unavoidably subject to be) “directed by no bad motive whatever, but a mere will acting independently of any,” (established constitution of nature or immutable laws, necessitating him to be influenced by such) “motive—My *blame* or *reproaches* therefore, being “ill-founded,” because his fault was *avoidable*, whereas, had it been *unavoidable* they would have been well founded, “and being incapable of having “any effect,” because it is not absolutely fixed that they shall *not* have any, “it is my wisdom to withhold them,” and not *blame* my son B. for doing *wrong*, when he was at perfect liberty to do right!

12. How fully the *Doctor* is satisfied with the admirable *clearness* of his own reasoning upon this subject and the irresistible force of his arguments appears from the following paragraph (P. 86.) “If “this be not a just, impartial and philosophical “state of the case, I do not know what is so: And “by this means it appears that the doctrine of the “*necessary influence of motives* upon the mind of man, “makes him the proper subject of discipline, reward and punishment, praise and blame, both in “the common and philosophical use of the words; “and the doctrine of *self-determination* entirely dis- “qualifies a man for being a proper subject of “them.” In other words, if a man’s determinations and actions be *necessary* and *unavoidable*, he is a proper subject of praise or blame, reward or punishment; but if he be a *free agent*, determining and acting *freely* and *not* from unavoidable necessity, he is *not so*, not a proper subject of *praise or blame*, re-
ward

ward or punishment. Such is the conclusion to which Dr. Priestley wishes to bring us, and such is the evidence upon which he establishes it! We have seen the case fairly and philosophically stated, we have heard the strongest arguments which can be brought in defence of it; and now if we are not convinced we must remain irreclaimable!

I am,

Reverend Sir,

Your's, &c.

J. B.

LETTER, VIII.

L E T T E R VIII.

Reverend and dear Sir,

IT would hardly escape your observation in reading my former letters, that Dr. Priestley every where confounds *discipline* with *punishment*, and takes it for granted that they are the same thing; that when a man is executed for murder upon a gibbet, it is as really an act of *discipline*, intended for his amendment, as when he is put into the house of correction for pilfering; and that when an obstinate, hardened sinner is bid to *depart accursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*, this is as truly designed to *reclaim him*, as when, for involuntary failings, and deplored, acknowledged faults, a true child of God is *chastized* by the rod of paternal love, that he may not be *condemned* with the ungodly! But however true it may be that the punishment of criminals on earth, may be contrived and designed by the wisdom and benevolence of human governments, and the punishment of impenitent sinners in Hell, by the divine Government, for the good of others, *men or angels*; yet it may require a greater fund of ingenuity and learning than even Dr. Priestley is possessed of, to prove that *justice* and *mercy* are the same thing in God and in man, and that punishments are always designed for the good of the *parties punished*!

2. But "it is said (adds the Doctor P. 86.) that the nature of *remorse* implies a self-determining power:" that is, that our feeling *remorse of conscience* or our *reproaching ourselves*, on account of committing any fault or crime, implies that we had it in our power not to have committed it. But the
 Doctor

Doctor is sure " that this is no other than the same
 " deception that he has explained before. For
 " blaming *ourselves* or blaming *another* are things of
 " the very same nature and depend upon the same
 " principles." And we have seen that we are only
 to blame another for *sin*, in the *same sense* in which
 we blame him for *sickness*, his *sin* being as much the
necessary result of the bad mechanism of his mind
 (or arrangement of matter in his brain) as his *sick-*
ness is the result of the bad constitution of his *body*.
 As therefore the *being grieved* that we ourselves or
 others are *sick*, does not imply a self-determining
 power whereby we or they might *chuse* whether
 we would be sick or not; so by parity of reason,
 the *being grieved* that we *sin* in any instance does
 not imply that we had it in our power *not to have*
sinned in that instance.

3. The doctor explains and proves this: " The
 " sense of *self-reproach* and *shame* is excited by our
 " finding that we have a disposition (mechanism)
 " of mind leading to vice, and on which motives
 " virtue, in particular cases, have had no influence:"
 just as *grief* is excited in finding we have a consti-
 tution of body leading to sickness, and on which
 medicines, for the recovery of health, have in
 certain cases had no influence. " If (P. 87.) I
 " blame myself for any thing else, viz. for not ex-
 " erting a self-determining power, by which I may
 " suppose that I might have acted otherwise, inde-
 " pendently of the previous disposition (mechanism)
 " of mind and the motives then present to it,"
 (when the liquor sparkled in the glass, or the har-
 lot smiled) " the idea is not at all adapted to excite
 any proper remorse. For it has been shewn" (and
 with what demonstration we have seen!) " to
 " afford no foundation for blame whatever, and in
 " the nature of things cannot possibly do it." As it
 is in the nature of things impossible it should
 afford

ford any foundation for *blameing* a man when he is *drunk* or commits *lewdness*, to know that he is under no *necessity* of acting so, but might have kept himself chaste and sober. "For on this supposition (that is, that he might have done otherwise) there is nothing vicious or blame-worthy, that is the proper cause of the action" (The Doctor must mean nothing *wrong* or defective in the mechanism of his mind) "but something that bears no sort of relation to morality," viz. the *wrong* of his liberty, the acting *wrong* when he might have acted *right*. This, according to the Doctor, bears no sort of relation to morality! Nor indeed any thing except materialism, mechanism and necessity, nothing according to his doctrine being moral except what is *mechanical*, *necessary* and *unavoidable*!

4. But how does Dr. *Priestley* prove that the wrong use of one's liberty bears no sort of relation to morality? why "morals (says he) depend upon inward dispositions of mind and good or bad habits," which, we are to remember, are the necessary and unavoidable consequence of the established constitution of nature and the immutable laws of the system; "but this self-determination is a thing capable of counteracting all dispositions and all habits, and not by means of contrary dispositions and contrary habits," necessarily and unavoidably introduced, (in which case one might bear with it) "but by a power of quite another nature;" a power implying that he who determined *foolishly* and acted *wickedly*, might, by suspending his volitions and actions till he had considered, and by applying to God in prayer for light and aid, have determined and acted otherwise, and to this power the Doctor is confident, "approbation or disapprobation, in a moral sense, praise or blame cannot possibly belong."

5. "A man indeed (P. 88.) when he reproaches
G "himself

" himself for any particular action in his past con-
 " duct, may fancy that if he was in the same situa-
 " tion again he would have acted differently. But
 " this is a mere deception, and if he examines him-
 " self strictly and takes in all circumstances, he may
 " be satisfied that with the same inward disposi-
 " tion," (mechanism) " of mind, and with pre-
 " cisely the same views of things he then had,
 " (which to him were *unavoidable*) " exclusive of all
 " others he has acquired by reflection *since*, he
 " could not have acted otherwise than he did.
 " But will this conviction," (viz. that as he was
 " circumstanced he could not have acted otherwise
 " than he did) " at all lessen his sense of grief or
 " shame?" Many will suppose it will, but the
 " Doctor is sure that " on the contrary it will only
 " more fully satisfy him that his disposition " (me-
 " chanism) " and habit of mind at that time were
 " bad that the vicious action was unavoidable.
 " And the sense which he now has of this deplorable
 " state of (the mechanism of) " his mind;" not
 " through any fall of his first parents, (which the
 " Doctor wholly disbelieves) but through the estab-
 " lished constitution of nature and the immutable
 " laws of the system formed by God, " will operate,
 " if those laws and that system so ordain, " to make
 " him act better and become better disposed for the
 " future, so that upon another similar occasion he
 " would not do what he did before," that is, I say
 " again, if it be so *appointed* and *fixed*, in the consti-
 " tution of nature and laws of the system; for they
 " must and will be obeyed in all things, great and
 " small, nor can any *determination* or *action*, though
 " or *discreet*, *temper*, *word* or *work* be otherwise than they
 " have fixed and appointed.

6. And now, my dear Sir, is it not apparent to
 any body, how well calculated this most *reasonable*
 and *perfectly consistent* doctrine is, to silence all the

clamorous

tamours of an accusing conscience and allay all
 our foreboding fears of divine vengeance! All our
 determinations and all our actions are appointed
 and fixed by immutable laws: They are all *necessa-*
ry and *unavoidable*: They could not possibly have
 been otherwise than they have been: "Our liberty
 in doing what we would was always accompani-
 ed with the necessity of doing what God would,
 neither less nor more." Nay "we have never
 had any passion, will or appetite of which God's
 will was not the cause." "Whatsoever is, is
 right:" Sin is as right as sickness: P. 115. It
 comes under the class of common evils, produ-
 cing misery for a time, but like all other evils in
 the same great system, is ultimately subervient to
 greater good. In this light therefore every thing
 without distinction may be safely ascribed to
 God." For "whatever terminates in good, phi-
 losophically speaking, is good." And though
 this is a view of moral evil which, however *in-*
nocent and even *useful* in speculation, no wise man
 can or would choose to act upon himself, because
 our understandings are too limited for the appli-
 cation of such a means of good; yet "a being
 of infinite knowledge may introduce it with the
 greatest advantage." And "whether we be vir-
 tuous or vicious (P. 116.)—it will be equally a
necessary part of the whole." Nay if we have
 even fallen into great and grievous crimes, still we
 need not be uneasy, for (P. 125.) "According to
 the most fundamental laws of nature and indeed
 the *very* nature of things, great virtues in some
 could not be generated, or exist; but in conjunc-
 tion with great vices in others; for it is this op-
 position that not only exhibits them to advantage
 but even, properly speaking, *creates* them."

7. In perfect consistency with this, the Doctor
 assures us (P. 122.) "it is well observed by a writer

“ who calls himself *Search*, *Moral evil*, were no evil, “ if there was no natural evil,” that is if God would be so indulgent as to suffer our sins to go unpunished, there would be no evil in them; a sentiment to which most thieves and robbers, adulterers and murderers will readily subscribe: They will readily believe that there would be no evil in the crimes they have committed, if magistrates on earth, and God in heaven would but omit to punish them. And with them, as with this Mr. *Search* and Dr. *Priestley* “it is a natural evil,” the punishment annexed to sin, and not sin itself, “ that creates the difficulty,” and they are perhaps willing to allow too, that “ the quality of this (natural) evil is the same from whatever causes it may arise.” And if they could but get rid of this and escape suffering, they could easily dispose of the sin. They could at least say with Mr. *Hume*, (in words which I rather wonder Dr. *Priestley* should find fault with (P. 118.) as they are inseparably connected with his doctrine “ upon the scheme of necessity human actions can either have no turpitude at all, as proceeding from so good a cause, (the Deity) or if they can have any moral turpitude, they must involve our Creator in the same guilt, while he is acknowledged to be their ultimate cause and author.” Or if they chuse rather to say with Dr. *Priestley* (P. 117) that “ our supposing God to be the author of sin as upon the scheme of necessity he must in fact be the author of all things, by no means implies that he is a sinful being;” yet on the principles above described, they will easily be able to shake off remorse on account of sin and rest assured that in sinning, they have done no great harm.

8. And methinks, dear Sir, if at any time we feel any sorrow or distress for sin, it can only be owing to our not adopting the Doctor's scheme or as he says to his friend, Dr. *Jebb*, in the *Dedication*

He not getting our minds "fully expanded to con-
 ceive and act up to the great principle asserted in
 his treatise," or not being "careful," as he there
 exhorts his friend, "to strengthen and extend these
 great and just views of this glorious system."
 Leaving you, Sir, to consider what great advantages
 will accrue to us by taking the *Doctor's* exhortation,
 and to reflect that, had this wonderful system been
 published to mankind in the early ages of the world,
 many hundreds and thousands of broken hearted
 sinners, would have been saved much unnecessary
 trouble and distress: which however could not be,
 because the established constitution of nature and
 the immutable laws of the system had fixed matters
 otherwise: and leaving you to congratulate our
 own age and nation upon the happiness it enjoys
 in being, through that established constitution and
 these immutable laws, destined to be so prolific of
sage Philosophers and sound Divines, who enlighten,
and bless it by their great and glorious discoveries;

I remain

Your obedient servant,

In him whose blood alone

Frees from condemnation,

JOSEPH BENSON.

L E T T E R IX.

Reverend and dear Sir,

IF a prospect of the advantages to be derived from this famous system will not induce us to venture with the Doctor into his philosophical Balloon, or persuade us to take hold on the three links of his chain, *Materialism*, *Mechanism* and *Necessity*, that he may draw us up above "the gross corruptions of Christianity," those fogs and mists which darken the prospects of vulgar minds;—if we still refuse to ascend with him to a situation so elevated, though thereby our views of men and things, of causes and effects would be enlarged and cleared in a manner hardly to be conceived by us, while we stand on this *low level* of common faith, termed *Orthodoxy*; yet methinks, while we keep our station on *firm ground*, we may, without danger of broken bones or dislocated limbs, follow him with our eyes a little longer, that, if possible, we may mark the height to which he soars, the point where he terminates his aerial voyage and the use he makes of his sublime discoveries.

2. You will not wonder, dear Sir, considering this strange and wonderful system, such, I think, as few, if any before himself, ever attempted to reconcile with Christianity, that "many of the Doctor's Philosophical acquaintance (as he tells us *Phil. Nec. P. 200.*) treat with a good natured ridicule his profession of Christianity:" and tho' (as he says) he may "either argue the case with them seriously, or smile in his turn at their ridiculing him;" yet, methinks, he will not easily convince them or any body else, who knows what

Christianity

Christianity is, that there is the least similarity between *his* principles and the grand fundamental doctrines of the religion of Jesus, as *they* have delivered them unto us, who, from the beginning, were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word,

3. But that is of little importance, for "to repeat what he has said on a former occasion, he can truly say (*Pref.* P. 22.) that if he were to take his choice of any metaphysical question to defend against all oppugners, it should be the doctrine of Philosophical Necessity: There is no truth of which he has less doubt and of the ground of which he is more fully satisfied, (not *that*, I presume, of the being of a God.) "Indeed there is no absurdity more glaring to his understanding than the notion of philosophical liberty." Under these strong, therefore, and according to his own system, irresistible impulses which bear away his mind like a billiard ball, what are the grand doctrines of Christianity, though founded on the inspiration of *Evangelists* and *Apostles*, that they should be able to make resistance, or to oppose so great a Doctor, in so swift a motion, towards so glorious an object, the converting all flesh to *So.in.anism*! Alas! the very foundation of these is undermined and they are thrown down in one moment! For whatever deference might be due to the authority of the *Evangelists*, and *Apostles* as *speakers*, concerning which *Dr. Priestley* cannot pronounce positively as he never heard them, yet, "he has frequently avowed himself not to be a believer in their inspiration, as *writers*," and therefore among other things "holds the subject of the miraculous conception to be one, with respect to which any person is fully at liberty to think, as the evidence shall appear to him." Lets. to *Dr. Hersely*.

4. By these views, it is plain, the Doctor is directed in all his Theological researches; and therefore

fore when he thinks the inspired writers "reason inconclusively," (as he is persuaded the Apostle Paul in particular *often* does, See *Hist. of Co.* Vol. 11. P. 370.) he pays no kind of deference to their authority. And in the general, in making quotations from them, he takes as much as he likes, or as suits his scheme, and leaves the rest. When their sentiments happen to tally with his own on any point, then he appeals to them and lays great stress upon their declarations. But when it is otherwise, as it generally is, Who are they, these *illiterate, unphilosophical fishermen*, who never spent a day in their lives in the study of mathematical or metaphysical truth, that *their* opinions should have any weight, when laid in the ballance against the profound Erudition and sage philosophy of Jos. Priestley L. L. D. F. R. S. and his two learned and deep thinking friends, John Jobb, M. D. and the Rev. Theophilus Lindsey? not to mention Mr. Hobbs, Lord Kaimes, or Dr. Hartley, their predecessors in the glorious cause of *materialism, mechanism, and necessity?*

5. But to return. As it is the Doctor's "firm persuasion (*Phil. Diss.* P. 356.) that *Materialism, Socinianism* and *Necessity*, are equally parts of one "system, and that whoever duly considers their "connexion and dependence on one another, will "find no sufficient consistency in any general "scheme of principles that does not comprehend "them all;" so, "having advanced what has occurred to him in support of all the *three* parts of "this system, he is confident that in due time the "truth (as he calls it) will bear down before it "every opposing prejudice, how inveterate soever, "and gain a firm establishment in the minds of all "men." As the minds of all men, are, according to his doctrine, nothing but pieces of mechanism, moved by mechanical laws, so the Doctor, it seems, having

having got a thorough insight into these curious Machines, and having, no doubt, long ago attained a perfect knowledge of *Mechanics*, is enabled by proper computations, concerning the *force of motives*, &c. to pronounce that by and by (he does not positively say when) all these *Clocks* will strike together and give three harmonious sounds, causing surrounding spheres to eccho, with *Materialism*, *Socinianism*, and *Necessity*.

6. In the mean time, till that happy day arrive when all flesh shall see (shall I say this *great salvation*? nay rather let me say) this dreadful degradation of our rational and immortal nature, and all Adam's posterity shall confess, with one voice, that they have no pre-eminence above the *beasts* of the earth, the *trees* of the wood, or the *water* of the river: the learned Doctor to apply as far as possible and make every present use that can be made of these *levers* and *pullies*, which his philosophical system contains, to heave from the mechanical minds of men some of these *gross corruptions* of Christianity, which, no doubt, clog their motions, and prevent so many of them from keeping pace with Dr. *Priestley* and his learned associates in their swift progress in making discoveries;—the Doctor (I say) assures us (*Disq. P. 335.*) that “it is a capital advantage of the doctrine of “Materialism, that it leaves no shadow of support “for the doctrine of (Christ's) Pre-existence,” which he calls “the injudicious exaltation of our Saviour.” For P. 355. “That man is wholly material is eminently subservient to the doctrine of “the proper or mere humanity of Christ. For “(they are his own words) if *no man* has a soul “distinct from his body, *Christ*, who in all other “respects appeared as a man could not have had a “soul” (nor, as he means, any nature whatever) “which had existed before the body.” And therefore

fore, like other men, could be no more than a piece of mere mechanism, a well contrived machine, all whose motions were *mechanical, necessary* and *unavoidable*.

7. The Doctor has now got the Son of God, the *Saviour of sinners, the Prince of the Kings of the earth*, as low as he could wish him. He has made him a mere piece of Clock-work, thinking, speaking and acting, in all things and at all times, by certain mechanical laws, which he could not possibly resist, and though as innocent of evil, yet as incapable of good, of piety or of virtue, as the wheel of a cart, or the flux and reflux of the tide. And to bring him low the Doctor is determined, for he has two strings to the bow which he draws (I hope *ignorantly*) against *Immanuel, God with us*, who how little soever the Doctor may be aware of it, both views his conduct and prays (as of old) "Father, forgive him for he knows not what he does!" For (*Disq. P. 356*) "should the Doctor have failed (of which, however, he entertains not the least doubt) "in the proof of the *materiality* of man, arguments enough remain independent of this, to prove the *non-pre-existence* of Christ," and that he is but a mere man, not so much as conceived in any extraordinary way, but begotten like other men, (only before proper wedlock) and as truly the son of *Josph* as of *Mary*.

8. And now, dear Sir, the way is perfectly cleared for doing all that remains to be done, for removing the remaining "gross errors, (as he calls them) which he tells us, (*P. 335*) "have gotten the name of Calvinism, such as Original sin, the "Atonement of Christ," and the Influence of divine grace upon the soul. For man being only a *mere body*, without a *soul*, a mere piece of mechanism, certainly can have no more sin, original or actual, than the trees of the field. And God;
having

Having formed him what he is, and constituted the whole chain of causes and effects, and set the machine agoing, surely could never be displeased with any of the motions, of which he was the *sole* and continual Author. Hence no *atonement* for sin could ever be wanted, it being impossible God should ever be offended with his own work. And then Christ himself, whom his followers have fondly supposed to be a *Mediator b. tween God and man*, so far from being worthy of being “advanced (as he expresses it P. 279.) to the high rank of the first and “principle emanation of the Deity, the *vous* or *λογος* “of the Platonists, and the *δημιουργος* under God “in making the world;” Christ himself, I say, being no more than a mere mechanical Being, without any proper liberty of *choice* or *action* could never be able truly to say, *Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, a body hast thou prepared me, so I come to do thy will*. O! God, by offering up that body; could never voluntarily, undertake our cause, suffer in our stead and atone for our sins.

9. And as to the *sc.i. it* of God visiting the souls of men, men have no souls to be visited by that spirit; they are mere matter and it is not conceivable by the Doctor how it is possible for *spirit* to act upon *Matter*. Nay “had the question (P. 160.) been “considered with due attention, what has been “called a *difficulty* would (he doubts not) have “been deemed an impossibility; or such a mystery “as that of the bread and wine in the Lord’s supper becoming the real body and blood of Christ, “or that of each of the three persons in the *Trinity* “being equally God, and yet there being no more “Gods than one; which in the eye of common “sense (he tells us) are not properly *difficulties* or “*mysteries*, but direct *contradictions*, such as that of “a thing *being* and *not being* at the same time.” And he pronounces (P. 61.) “that let a man torture his “imagination

"imagination as much as he pleases, it is impossible
 "for him to conceive even the possibility of *mutual*
 "action without some common property.—A sub-
 "stance that is *hard*, may act and be acted upon by
 "another hard substance or even by one that
 "is soft,—but it is certainly impossible it should
 "affect or be affected by a substance that can make
 "no resistance (*viz.* a spiritual substance) and es-
 "pecially a kind of substance that cannot, with
 "any propriety of speech, be said to be even in the
 "same place with it. If this be not an impossibi-
 "lity (adds he) I really do not know what is so."

ro. It is true, he says these things with respect
 to the *soul* not being able, were it a *distinct, spirit-*
ual, and *immaterial* substance, as is generally supposed,
 to affect or influence the *body*: but if his reasoning
 has any force, it is equally conclusive against God,
 as a *Spirit*, being able to influence the mind of man,
 which the Doctor thinks to be wholly material, or
 indeed to influence matter in general. Hence he
 tells us, three pages after, that "Bausobre acknow-
 "ledges this difficulty even with respect to the
 "Deity himself, but (adds he) he gives us no as-
 "sistance with respect to the solution of it." Bau-
 sobre's words, as quoted by the Doctor are "If the
 "substance of the first Mover be absolutely imma-
 "terial, without extension and without size, one
 "cannot conceive how it should give motion to
 "matter; because such a substance can have no
 "hold of them, (material substances) any more than
 "they have upon it. We must therefore have re-
 "course to the Christian system, according to
 "which God acts upon matter by an act of his will
 "only." "But (says Dr. Priestley) if the *substance*
 "of a spirit cannot act upon matter, how can the
 "mere *volition*, which is the mere *act* of a spirit
 "affect it?" He therefore is inclined to think that *God*
himself is material, (at least as far as the world is so)

a doctrine which relieves us under the great difficulty of conceiving how the world could be made out of nothing; for in that case it might be made out of God. See P. 18. *Phil. Disq.* And observes P. 108. "should any person think proper to apply the term *material* to both natures (viz to God as well as man) the Hypothesis he advances concerning matter makes it to be a very different kind of materialism from the grosser sort." And he tells us (P. 176.) "that he has considered the doctrine of proper immateriality both by the light of nature and also of the Scriptures, without finding any foundation for it in either."

11. It appears therefore, that, according to the Doctor, the *Anima mundi*, the *Soul of the world*, the *Deity* himself, as well as the soul of man, is a refined kind of matter, and therefore, for any thing he knows to the contrary, may be the effect of a certain arrangement of grosser matter in the Universe, that *greater world*, as the soul of man is the effect of a certain arrangement of matter in his body that *lesser world*. So that instead of God making the *world* as the vulgar have unphilosophically believed, the *world* might make God, even as the *body* makes the *soul*. If therefore we have the courage to follow our Doctor as far as he will lead us, he will bring us in the end to downright *Atheism* or *Spinozism*, either that there is no God at all, or that the *world* is God. Nay he will not even stop there: for after having proved that there is nothing but matter in the Universe, he will then turn the tables and demonstrate, on the other side, that there is no matter at all!

12. He had deemed it an *insuperable difficulty*, nay an *absolute impossibility* to conceive how a *spiritual* and *immaterial* substance could act upon matter, because such a substance (P. 61.) having according to the usual definition of it, "no relation to place,

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" must

"must in that case act where it is not." But his system supposes that *matter* can act *where it is not*. For having denied *solidity* and *impenetrability* to be properties of matter, and having made its properties to be only *repulsion* and *attraction*, he supposes that repulsion and attraction both take place at some distance from the real surface of bodies, which is certainly making them act *where they are not*. This, indeed he acknowledges, in the illustrations he has added to his work (P. 350.) as "a considerable *difficulty*," and tells us that "some deem it an absurdity." But be it a difficulty or even an *absurdity*, he will swallow it, rather than give up his doctrine of *Materiaism*, *Mechanism* and *Necessity*, the three links of the adamantine chain, which he has made to bind both God and man.

13. But this is not all. He not only makes matter act, *where it is not*, but he makes it act *when it is not*, when, according to his scheme, it can absolutely have no existence. He denies that it has any *solid extent*, or that there is any thing whatever "properly solid or impenetrable" in it. *Disq.* P. 16. "That it is possessed of powers of attraction and repulsion he knows, but that there is any thing *in or belonging* to matter capable of resistance beside those powers of repulsion, does not appear from any phenomena that we are yet acquainted with; and therefore, as a Philosopher, he is not authorized to conclude that any such a thing exists." Matter therefore is *nothing*, *repelling* and *attracting*. "It has been asserted, (says he P. 17.) and the assertion has never been disproved, that, for any thing we know to the contrary, all the solid matter in the solar system might be contained within a *nutshell*." But if we will have a little patience, he will bring it into less compass than a nutshell. "It is objected (says he P. 351.) "that according to my definition of matter it must be absolutely

"absolutely *nothing*, because, besides extension" (observe there is no *solid* extension) "it consists of nothing but the powers of "*attraction* and *repulsion*," and because I have sometimes said it consists of "physical points *only*, possessed of those powers." In this he owns he "may have expressed himself "rather incautiously." But (P. 358.) "If they say "that on this hypothesis there is no such thing as "matter and that every thing is spirit, he has no "objection." And P. 161 "If he be asked how "upon his hypothesis matter differs from spirit," he "answers that it no way concerns him or true "Philosophy to maintain that there is any such difference between them, as has hitherto been supposed." The creating mind and the created substance (he believes) are equally destitute of solidity or impenetrability. P. 18. *Phil. Disq.* so that we are come round again to where we set out. First, There is no *spirit* in the Universe, even God himself, the father of spirits, is *material*: All is *matter* both the *Creator* and his *Creatures*. Secondly, All the matter in the Solar system may be contained in a *nutshell*: nay there is no matter at all: all is *spirit* or *nothing*!

14. Thus, Sir, the two hemispheres meet each other and one may arrive at the East-Indies by sailing *west* as well as *east*. So that Dr. *Priestley* and Dr. *Berkley*, these two profound Philosophers, that have honoured our nation and enriched literature with their extraordinary discoveries, are at no such distance from each other as they have been supposed, but though setting out in contrary directions, have however arrived at the same end. Dr. *Berkley* set his face to prove that there is *no material world*, no matter at all in the universe; but that *all is spirit*; And Dr. *Priestley* has set his face the contrary way and proceeded to shew that there is *no spirit*, that the whole world is composed of mere
matter

matter, even the mind of man, and that God himself is material. And after long and laborious wanderings, they have met at length in one point and we learn from them both, that ALL IS NOTHING. I hope the shipwreck their schemes have suffered, will deter, at least, the vulgar, from venturing to follow them, in the boundless seas of speculation and fancy, and that they will be willing to leave these and such like philosophical Doctors, to turn to the Prophets and Apostles; and especially to the wisdom of the Father speaking as never man spake, to whom the Father bore testimony saying, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him.* I hope they will be willing to turn, with me, to the inspired volume, and enquire what it teaches with respect to this subject.

15. Though I think, dear Sir, that this wild scheme of doctrine confutes itself, and is too great an absurdity throughout, in all its parts, for any but philosophers to swallow; yet for the confirmation of my own faith and that of any into whose hands these sheets may fall, and as an introduction to my giving to the public the unfinished papers Mr. Fletcher had left in answer to the Doctor on one of those heads, viz. the *Divinity of Christ*; I have put down and shall immediately submit to the Christian reader a few passages of Scripture which seem to me absolutely to disprove his doctrine of the mere materiality of man, and to prove to a demonstration the distinction generally supposed to exist between soul and body, and that the former continues to live when the latter dies. The foundation being thus destroyed, the superstructure erected upon it, Dr. Priestley's strong castle which he undertakes to defend against all assailants, viz. that man is a mere machine and that all his actions and volitions are necessary and unavoidable, falls of course and becomes "like the baseless fabric of a vision."

"vision." Though indeed (independent of this) his doctrine of *Necessity* has been already very ably and fully confuted by others on other grounds, as have also his arguments and those of Dr. Taylor against original sin. What remains of the Socinian Doctrine, respecting the *Attonement of Christ* and *divine Grace*, may hereafter come under our consideration, should God be pleased to give ability and opportunity.

Bewailing, that under the gospel which hath brought *life and immortality to light*, we should be obliged to go back beyond the the state of *heathenism*, and prove to persons, that call themselves Christians that the *soul* does not die with the *body*, a truth known and believed among the most savage nations,

I remain

Reverend and dear Sir,

Your Son in the Gospel,

And Servant in Christ Jesus,

JOSEPH BENSON.

END OF THE LETTERS.

The Books referred to in these Letters

Are Dr. Priestley's *Philosophical Disquisitions.*

Philosophical Necessity.

History of Corruptions, and

Letters to Dr. Horsley.

E R R A T A.

Page 21, line 35, for *causes* read *cause*.

46, l. 24, r. *as* his thoughts.

47, l. 19, r. doctrine of Necessity.

61, l. 1, r. blaming.

64, l. 11, instead of *a* natural, r. natural,

74, l. 31, r. becoming.